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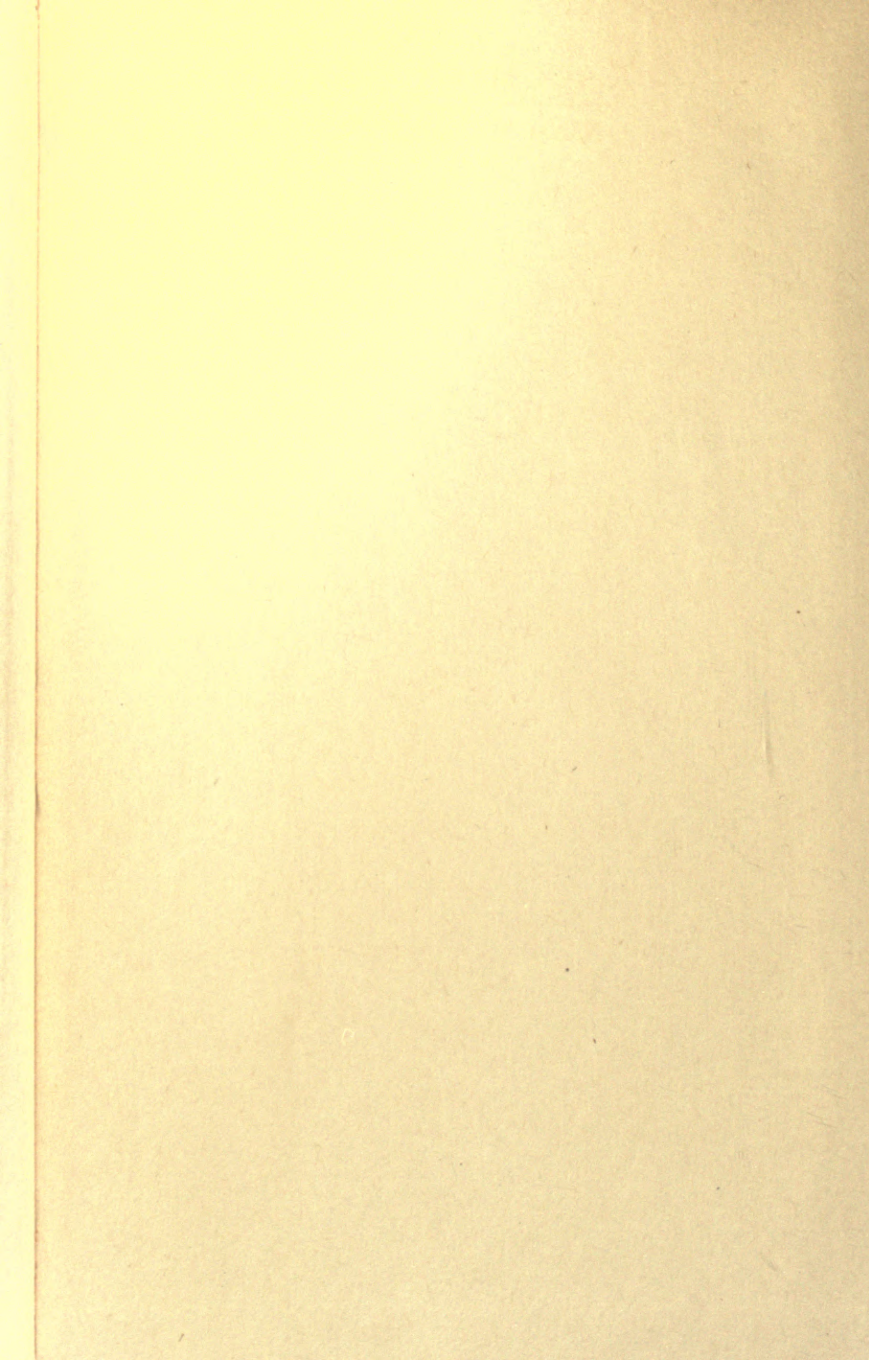
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LAUGHTER LIMITED

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

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BY

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

AUTHOR OF "TOMORROW WE DIET," "IT PAYS TO SMILE,"
"WEST BROADWAY," "ADAM'S GARDEN," ETC.

*Property of
Maude D. Whetwath*

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TO
GEORGE H. DORAN
IN FRIENDSHIP AND FAITH
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INTRODUCTION

WHEN some people write the story of their life it is a sign that they are dead. Take Johnson, the one that Boswell wrote the scenario for. And look how Shakspeare wrote about Cæsar after somebody had handed him a haymaker. And now watch Mr. Tumulty. And so forth.

There are in the motion-picture world also a class of dead ones who allow somebody else to write their biography. Dead from the neck up, anyways. They may be alive as stars all right, but they couldn't write a continuity for the story of a custard pie. So when one of the trade or fan papers decides to shove a piece of their private history before the public for consideration of one dollar in hand paid and other good and valuable consideration, why, all the star generally does is sign the piece and 'phone down to the publicity department for some new stills.

As a result there is a lot of misunderstanding in the public mind about what goes on in pictures. I mean about the real inside dope. Some have the idea that we are a bunch of sky chasers who never hit anything lower than the roof of the Singer Building, and are morally as bad if not worse than what they think rich

society people are. But these of course are not the sappy fans who believe what they read in the picture magazines. These latter go around with the cuckoo illusion that a motion-picture star's private life is all front lawn, white flannel clothes, dainty children and sweet mothers, the whole served with vanilla sauce, and tintured with extract of noble sentiment. While as a plain matter of fact neither type of fan is correct.

Realizing it to be high time somebody who knew told the truth about pictures and picture people was what decided me on writing my own story instead of making my mark just under the Tille on the stuff Benny had sent up to me from our lot.

"Miss Delane," says young Mr. Rolf, our publicity head, flapping a fat typewritten manuscript at me. "The Big Egg has O.K.'d this script for Closeups. It's your autobiography and it ought to go over big. Kate Kinner wrote it—the girl who did your How-I-Brush-My-Teeth story, and that thing of yours about The Way to Hold Men, for the same magazine."

"Give me it," I says, reaching for the dope sheet; and he did, and this is what I saw:

MY PAST AND MY PEOPLE

Bonnie Delane, Famous Silvermount Star, tells her own story exclusively for Closeups Magazine. The inner life of America's best-known picture actress revealed for the first time for Closeup readers.

"Oh, is that a fact?" I says, very much interested. "This is a revelation not only to the public but to me. How does your department get that way, anyhow?"

"Oh, it's a good story," says Slim Rolf hastily. "You'll like it. We start you out the daughter of a Spanish countess and describe your father, the general, and how you went to the most exclusive schools and convents until the big smash came, and——"

"Hold!" I says. "Big smash is well said! And as for old General Debility—say, Slim, how far do you think you can go, anyways? With your imagination you ought to be in the scenario department."

"Well, far be it from me to tell the truth on you, honey," says Rolf with a grin.

"That's a nasty crack from a broken little mug like you!" I says. "What's the matter with introducing a little truth into pictures for a novelty?"

"What do you want to do—wreck the industry?" says he.

"Say, listen!" I says. "If the industry could of been wrecked it would of happened long ago, with the bunch of clowns running it that is! Nix! Pictures are too strong ever to be wrecked by anything unless it's this continual false front the ones that is in it keeps up all the time."

"Whatter you mean, false front?" says Rolf.

"I mean in every department!" I says. "And in practically every concern. Also in the private lives of actors and etcetera. You know as good as I do, Rolfie, that we as a industry, generally speaking, have got into the habit of thinking that we could get away with murder if only we kept on showing a baby-blue side to the public and advertising it enough. Sweet daddy! If the picture people really lived the lives the picture

magazines attribute to them they would all be dead of anæmia long ago!"

"Ennui!" says Slim.

"Well, something weakening!" I conceded. "And say, honey," I went on, "you don't for one minute think the public believes that guff, do you?"

"They buy it," he pointed out. "You see, Bonnie, they don't want to know the truth!"

"Don't they, though!" I exclaimed. "Say, listen! There's nothing in the world they would rather know. Pictures are the biggest, most important art in the world to-day and have got the biggest future of any, and the public knows it. Also the public hears a lot of dope about wild times, big money, crooked contracts, and something-for-nothing generally; and as it is their admission money which is being spent that way, they are interested. Also because of the glamour of it, Slim, but most of all because pictures have come to stay—people believe in them, and with cause. They are the greatest——"

"Whoa!" says Rolfie. "Any time you get fired come over to the hot-air department and see me."

"But I mean it!" I says earnestly. "This is the greatest art-industry in the world, and truth would never hurt it; truth, you know, kid, never injured any innocent party yet!"

"Have a heart!" says Slim. "When did pictures get so pure? How about the B. and G. merger? And Reggie's contract with Goldringer—eh?"

"Oh, I know there is plenty of crooks out of jail," I says impatiently, "but they are not all in the picture

business. There are also plenty of angels out of heaven, and they are not all registered exclusively with us, either. And my publishing twelve installments of fumigated biography isn't going to fool anybody. Why, nobody could be as pure or as swell as this stuff makes me out, and live! I refuse to let it be printed."

"The hell you say!" remarked Slim. "Well, the magazine has contracted for your life story, and we got to deliver. Besides, think of the publicity!"

"All right!" I says, inspired. "I got nothing to do for the next week; I'll write it myself!"

Rolf looked at me as if he'd overdrawn at the bank.

"Well, go easy, now!" he says uncomfortably. "Of course you are your own boss and can do as you like, but just kindly remember you are under no real necessity to tell on the family."

"I'll tell nothing uncalled for," I says. "Although, of course, no matter what I write somebody will be sure to kick about it."

"And you'll publish what you write?" says Slim, wrinkling up his nose in a troubled way he has.

"I will," I says, firm as an old maid at the altar.

"That's a hell of a note!" says Rolf. "Well, I wisht you'd leave me see it before it goes out."

"Nix!" I replied.

"But there's likely to be mistakes in grammar and everything!" Rolfie objected frankly.

"There will be, in the grammar," I said. "But no editing from you, much obliged just the same!"

"Well, don't put any salt on the tail of any boom-

erang, that's all, Bonnie," says Slim, gloomily picking up his kelly and the rejected script, "or you might catch it in the neck yourself!"

Flashing which melancholy subtitle he departed, and left me stacked up against the big proposition which I had undertaken.

Well, after Slim had gone I got to thinking the matter over, and the more I thought the greater amount of enjoyment I got out of it.

To begin with, everybody will realize how much pleasure it is for any woman to talk about herself. And further, the merest dumb-bell will realize what a kick is to be got out of telling the story of one's life. Anybody will do it—just give 'em the chance, that's all! Of course the habit is mostly confined to drunks, but pretty nearly anyone will come across after a little urging, and some, on the contrary, you can't stop from doing it. Lacking the chance to recite the story of our life the next best thing is to write it. And in either case the beginning is apt to be a bore.

Nobody but yourself cares about how you felt as a kid, or your awakening to the big problem of there-is-no-Santa-Claus, and other religious convictions. And the chief reason for this is that life doesn't really begin until you go out into it.

So I decided to let the reader take for granted that I was born in my native town, and et cetera, and commence with my own start, which really began on the opening night of The Stonybrook Follies of 1920. And I also decided not to have any fool title to this

biography, such as they run in the ordinary picture magazine, but to call it by the simple plain name of

THE REAL STORY OF
BONNIE DELANE'S STARTLING CAREER
—BY HERSELF

CHAPTER I

I NEVER could have done it if I had known Strick was in the audience. You know how it is, perhaps. You can make a swell snappy speech at the stag dinner, but only stutter if friend wife is among those present. Or if your sweetie is down front, the valedictory which sounded so well in front of your bedroom mirror comes out like the contents of a non-refillable bottle, in little spouts and dashes.

So it's a good thing I didn't know Strick was there until afterward, although why I didn't see him when I looked out at the audience from behind the curtains of the high-school-auditorium stage is a wonder to me because to begin with he was a complete stranger to our town and was sitting all the time with Bert Green, our leading and only photographer, and I was kind of looking for old Bert Green, he being a particular friend of mine and had taken a lot of photos of me free, on account of my map going so well in his showcase.

But some way or another I missed seeing either of those boys. You know the way a big hall seating nearly three hundred people and all lit up with a dozen or more electric lights looks from the stage—sort of blurry and confusing. I could hardly tell one from another, except, of course, pop, but then I had bought his seat myself and I could plainly see him

occupying it and a little bit of the seats on either hand, as well.

Then I was terribly excited, too. Ridiculous, of course, because here I had been acting in every show the Stonybrook Dramatic Club had given for the past three winters, or since I was just barely fifteen, and ought to have become accustomed to the big audiences that always turned out on these occasions. But although I was San Whoosis the year we gave *The Mikado* and that's the leading woman's part, and had led the *Floradora Sextet* in the performance we gave for the benefit of the new church organ, and other parts besides, not to mention receiving the Mrs. Carrie Benton Prize for elocution in grammar school, I had never got over being nervous before a performance, and going all hot and cold and my throat pulsing and other bona fide symptoms of the genuine artistic temperament. And this night of the Stonybrook Follies of 1920, which was a sort of super amateur vaudeville, I was about to do a daring novelty specialty which my chum Ella Benton and Mr. Schoonmacker, our choir-master, and I had gotten up ourselves, so I felt more temperamental than usual.

It was really a wonderful program we had, taking off all the follies of the town of Stonybrook, you see. There was a opening violin solo by little Annie Benton, Ella's younger sister, and the committee had put that on the program first because of being afraid the folks wouldn't wait for it otherwise as Annie was only eleven and her mother had kindly but firmly volunteered Annie's services.

Then after Annie had played Moonlight on the Sonata, by Beethoven, there was a scream of a skit on our Ladies' Literary Club meeting, with fat old Mr. Edwards, the bicycle-repair-shop man, as Mrs. Edwards, his own wife, leading the meeting. Then after that a couple of the boys sang a song that had a line on pretty nearly everybody in the hall in it, to the tune of You'd be Surprised, and Mr. Schoonmacker, in evening clothes, played A Medley Jazz on the piano, and then came our act.

It was a parody on Trixie Trueman in her great special film production Rich Men's Daughters, and I took the part of Trixie. It was the scene where Trixie is rocking the cradle with her poor little unwanted baby in it, and her father—that was Mr. Schoonmacker—goes off to work, and the heavy—that was Ella, in boy's clothes, mustache and all—comes in and tries to kill them both. If I do say it we had gone to a lot of trouble with the set, having hung black mosquito netting between us and the audience, and hiring a special machine all the way from New Haven, which Joe Shilke, the colored janitor of the school, operated for us from the balcony and which threw a flickery light on us while we acted, giving just exactly the effect of a moving picture—almost.

Well, I went through my part without accident, and Mr. Schoonmacker was fine, and if Ella hadn't lost her mustache in the excitement towards the end, the act would of gone off perfectly. By good luck the folks thought she lost it on purpose, and anyways the act went over big, so that when I left the stage my

cheeks felt like they was burning up, and I hardly knew I was walking as I come around through the wings where the blackboards and desks and things which usually occupied the stage had been stored for the evening, meaning to go down front in my costume and make-up and see the rest of the show myself; also to give the audience another chance to look at me the way I was. It's awful hard to lay off acting, once you got a costume on.

Well, as I come down the steps from the stage door that opened out into the hall, naturally one or two grabbed me and told me how good I was, and first among them of course was Bert.

"Bonnie, you were immense!" he says in a loud whisper, his glasses falling off his long nose the way they always did every few minutes when he got excited, but always fortunately being caught by the black string he had them on. "Immense—simply great! We all thought you were wonderful!"

"Did you, honestly, Bert?" I whispered back. And then I noticed Bert was not alone. Behind him in the dimness was another man—some boy, I could lamp that, even in the dark! And then in another second Bert was making us acquainted.

"Meet Miss Bonnie McFadden, Mr. Greg Strickland," Bert whispered. "Stricky thought your acting was immense," he added in a whisper as the elegant Mr. Strickland and I shook.

"Delighted!" he murmured. "Aren't you coming to sit with us?"

I could only nod dumbly, because the curtain was

getting ready to struggle up again by now, and we had to hustle into our seats. But all through the next number, which was a kind of Americanized Greek dance, rendered by Miss Lassell, the Delsarte teacher, I could hardly look at the stage for looking at Mr. Strickland, and yet trying not to let him know it.

This bird was far different from any which had as yet flown into our town; I got that right away. And I was in a position to know, because of meeting probably more visiting men than any other girl. You see I did practically all the buying for pop's store and saw every traveling man that come through. But none of these were the least bit like Mr. Strickland.

I kept sizing him up out of the corner of my eye, and he certainly had class. Washed? Within an inch of his life! He was the most thoroughly washed-looking person I had ever set eyes on. He even smelled faintly of some clean scent that wasn't soap and certainly wasn't cologne. The handkerchief peeping out of his breast pocket was pure linen with a hand-embroidered cut-work monogram, and everything else about him was to match. I don't mean in the sense of socks and tie and colored border. Far from it. I mean he had class; snap and an awful lot of knowledge showed in every line. He sure give me a thrill, and made me wild with excitement about who and what he was and where he come from. And when in the middle of Miss Lassell's Greek dance he leaned across me and whispered to Bert, I nearly passed out on the minute, for here is what he said.

"I say, Bert!" he whispered, not loud, but only so's

the people in our immediate vicinity could hear him—"I say, Bert, the last time I had dinner with Doug and Mary, Charlie did a parody of a dance like that, and by Jove, it was almost as funny as this is!"

"Is that so?" says Bert. "It must of been immense! Mr. Strickland is in the pictures," he added to me.

Well, he didn't need to. I had got it the first time. My heart give a jump so big it's a wonder I didn't lose it. So that was the answer, was it? I might of known! Perhaps he was even a well-known lead? I took a good look at his handsome profile, and decided not. If he had been anybody's juvenile I would of known it, for very few had got by me, even then, and I don't know how our local picture theater would of met expenses only for Ella and me.

"So you are in the pictures, Mr. Strickland?" I whispered at him.

"Ah—yes!" he whispered back. "Casting director with Silvermount."

That was pretty nearly too much for me. If he had of said he was the President it wouldn't of been half the jolt. Mr. and Mrs. Cummings, in front, heard and turned to look. Also everybody else in hearing distance, one at a time, the way they do when they overhear things. Then Miss Lassell's act was over to polite clapping and the lights come on. Right away Mr. Strickland turned toward me, leaning on the back of his chair in a pose of elegant restlessness, his big brown eyes sort of eating me up.

"I say, Bertie, old boy," said he, still looking at me, however, "can't we cut out of this and go some-

where? I'm sure Miss McFadden has seen this amateur stuff often enough already, and I'm dying to talk to the only real actress in the show!"

Imagine!

"Why, I guess we could go over to the ice-cream parlor," says Bert.

"How about it?" says Strickland quickly to me, already reaching for his hat. "Let's go!"

"All right!" I says. "But my make-up——"

"Oh, never mind it," says Strickland. "It is charmingly becoming."

And then somehow we were up and leaving the hall. A thing which simply wasn't done at a Stonybrook Dramatic Club's annual performance. People turned and stared. But all of a sudden I felt miles above them; I belonged to the professional world. A talented young actress using her privilege of behaving different from the common herd and just naturally beating it off in company with a casting director and a art photographer. We should worry about a bunch of hicks gathered to watch a bum amateur show, or what they thought of us!

In fact the only thing worried me was that pop might spot us and wish himself on the party. But luckily he didn't, and I got my coat out of the lobby as quick as I could, and then the three of us set off along the wet, wintry street in the dark, with the damp leaves sticking to the tar pavements and to our shoes, down towards Joe's place, where the red-and-white electric ice-cream sign made a bright spot in the silent center of town.

"Are you staying here long, Mr. Strickland?" I asked as soon as I got courage enough to control my throat.

"Just for to-night," he said. "I have my reservations West for to-morrow. I've wired the Coast to expect me by Monday at the latest."

"California?" says I.

"Yes," says Mr. Strickland, swishing at the dead leaves. "Hollywood. You'd better come along," he added, laughing.

"Sure thing!" I says. "Will you get me a job?"

"I'd like the chance, no kidding," says he. "You have a face that would screen wonderfully, Miss McFadden."

"That's what I always tell her!" says old Bert eagerly. "I'd just like to show you the last set of cabinet photos I've made of her."

"I'd like to see them," says Strickland. "Of course you know you are exactly Trixie Trueman's type," he went on. "Only of course she is dark. By the way, I see in the papers that she hasn't yet signed her new contract with Silverman, just as I advised her. He only offered her twenty-five hundred a week, which is of course absurd for a girl in her position. I told her she'd be a fool to take it unless he gave her a piece of the picture as well."

"Of course!" I says, trying to appear as casual as he. "How ridiculous!"

"Why, I think it's immense!" put in Bert, his eye-glasses falling off. "Simply immense! What they

tell about the big money in pictures is really so, then? I always thought it was just for advertising!"

"Of course it's true," says the visitor. "Fairbanks makes at least a million a year, and heaven only knows what the producers rake in! Of course a little chap like myself isn't worth much—I only draw down five hundred a week myself, but then, what do you expect for doing all the real work?"

He seemed to think so little of the money that I didn't dare pass any remark about that. But an idea was already pounding my brain.

"Bert," I says, "if Mr. Strickland would really like to see how I photograph couldn't you show him some pictures?"

"Why not run up to the studio instead of the ice-cream place?" said Mr. Strickland. "We can smoke up there."

"Well, if Bonnie says so," says Bert doubtfully. "We are right at it now."

"Of course, why not?" I says, trying to be naturally Bohemian, but my heart pounding. To begin with, it was the first time anybody in Stonybrook had called Bert's shop a studio. Secondly, it was also the first time I had ever gone to a studio at night. But I did it. That evening I was crazy, and happy. All made up like an actress, in a studio, with two professional men; with cigarettes, even! When we were inside, and Bert was getting out my pictures, I even took a cigarette myself, from Mr. Strickland's gold-filled case.

"You know you really ought to go in the pictures,

Miss McFadden!" he says, lighting it for me. "No kidding; you are wasting your time in this dead little burg."

"Am I really like Trixie Trueman?" I says. "She's my favorite. I don't care so much for some of the others. I go to pictures a lot, and I'm awfully critical."

"No wonder!" says he. "Considering what a lot most actors get away with! But you'd be a hit, I know! I'll say you are the best-looking girl I've seen in years. You won't mind me saying that?"

"And you think I'd screen?" says I.

"My dear girl, it's my business to know!" he comes back at me. "What do you think a casting director is?"

Well, up to then I hadn't been exactly sure, but now I realized that my hunch had been right. He was the bird that picked the chickens for parts! I wasn't any more excited than if I had found a diamond necklace. But I didn't show it—much.

"You know you really are a most unusual type," he went on. "Quite ideal, in fact. Those yellow curls, now—I'll bet they are your own!"

"Of course!" I says.

"Trixie's aren't," said he.

"What?" says I.

"Great heavens, I've seen her pin them on!" he laughed.

I just absolutely couldn't speak for a moment. They paid her twenty-five hundred a week and her hair was false, and mine was real! Why, if that was so my hair ought to be worth heavens knew what!

"Look at these!" says Bert proudly, bringing out my pictures, every one of them mounted on his special embossed extra-strong folders, sepia finished.

There I was at two years, at six, at ten. Then in my graduation dress. And these I sort of hated Mr. Strickland to see, but Bert loved them all. The one with the gauze around my bare shoulders and the rose behind my ear had more class, and my heart thumped hard when Mr. Strickland held it up to the arch light.

"Wonderful future!" he murmured. "All you've got to do is to try! You ought to come out to the Coast. It's the only sensible thing to do."

CHAPTER II

“OF course if I were to come out to Los Angeles,” I says languidly, “it would have to be made worth my while. I really can’t afford experiments.”

“Hollywood is where you’d go,” says he. “That’s the real picture center. And of course you couldn’t expect to make a million right off the post. A bit would be as much as you’d be likely to pry off for a while, but even seventy-five or a hundred a week is enough to exist on until you got on your feet. As I was saying to Bill Hart the other night over at his place. ‘Bill,’ I said, ‘the trouble with pictures is that there are not enough people in them willing to start at the bottom; they all want to jump in at the top.’”

“I’d start at the beginning,” I said breathlessly, “and I’d manage on seventy-five a week! Why, Mr. Strickland, I never received seventy-five dollars all at once in my life! Do you think I could make that much, no kidding?”

He laughed in that easy, refined way of his, showing his white teeth, awfully sharp under the neat little dark mustache.

“Say, listen, Bonnie,” he says. “You’d knock ’em cold out there. Why, you’d draw a job at that price twenty-four hours after you landed.”

"Your words are like music, Stricky," I says right back at him, first name and all, just to show I was no amateur. "But I don't see how I could get away."

"Say, listen!" he said. "Why not come out? Think of Hollywood as compared to this dump! No cold, no rain to speak of—lots of sunshine and flowers all the year. And the beaches—wait until you see the beaches! You couldn't give me the East! Not after living ten years on the Coast! Why, there's nothing to it!"

He meant no argument against it. I give a sigh and stared about at Bert's handsome, real varnished, all-solid-white-pine studio with the framed group of the Sunshine Society Convention on the south wall. Gee, but it seemed unreal to me at that moment! The only reality was the picture of California that Stricky had just parked in my mind. It was as delicious as perfume. But I didn't lose my head. I'd met too many traveling men single-handed, for that.

"California would be nice," I says, "if you are sure I could get a job there."

"Why, there's nothing to it!" he says again. "With your face, your hair, your figure, and your height—About four feet eight, aren't you?" I nodded.

"I thought so!" he exclaimed. "The ideal Hollywood height! Play opposite any man in the pictures without dwarfing him. That's important. I was talking to Charlie Chaplin not long ago about that very thing. So many queens are too tall to play across from him, you see!"

Well, I wasn't blind of course. But my height was

a talent of mine I hadn't considered before. However, I begun to get an idea that maybe I was really as good as I had all along been hoping I was. I decided to present this bird's own check and see would he honor it; and so in a voice I could hardly control I put it up to Stricky—put it up straight.

"Will you give me a job, Stricky?" I says.

"Sure I will—any time you come out," he says promptly. Too promptly. Then he pulls out a card from a leather case with gold corners to it. "You can always reach me there," says he.

I took it and read it before tucking it away in the pocket of my seal-plush coat: "G. Robert Strickland, Silvermount Productions, Hollywood."

There was a little silence for a moment while I did this. And I stretched it out on purpose, because of revolving something further over in my mind. I ached to say it, but hardly dared. Suppose I pulled my demand and then found that I had also pulled a boner? Suppose my lack of complete trust in him got him off me for life, just as we was getting real friendly? If I lost my chance by being too business-like I might never get another like it again. Then, on the other hand, I'd been running things in pop's store too long not to of learned that business is business and friendship ought always to be to one side of it. I remembered this, and also that when I ordered a bill of goods for the store I never hesitated to sign my name to the order and so why should Mr. G. Robert Strickland?

Of course there was no comparison between order-

ing me and ordering a dozen cases of lemon soda. But the principle was the same in both instances. Realizing this great truth, that clean-cut business affairs makes friendships and never broke one yet, I decided to take a chance. Looking at him with my own peculiar trusting, baby stare I shot.

"And will you give me a contract, Stricky?"

"Why—er—well, of course!" says he, more surprised than I liked.

"Now?" I says.

He laughed his gay laugh at that.

"Listen to the kid!" he cried. "Say do you think I go around evenings with the legal department in my vest pocket?"

"But you do make contracts of course?" Bert put in over the top of his glasses.

"Why—er—certainly we do!" says Strick. "But our legal department has to draw them up. I haven't a form with me, worse luck, or we might get it done right here in town."

"Then will you mail me one as soon as you get to the Coast?" I kept on at him. "I'd like to have something definite before I start West."

"All right, I'll do that little thing!" says Strick lightly. "You said it! And I'll get you the best money a beginner ever had, Bonnie, my dear!"

How easy it was to get into the pictures. What a snap! Just like I had read about a hundred times. All a person needed was a good screen face and half an opening. And I had both. All of a sudden I felt it was time to go home, to beat it while I had things

where I wanted them. And outside of that, the strain had been something fierce for a few moments. Right now I wanted the air, I wanted to be alone so's to be able to pinch myself and be sure I was awake, and give myself a good look in the mirror. Stonybrook, Connecticut, wasn't real any more. Only Bonnie McFadden was real. A hundred dollars a week! Bonnie McFadden's salary! A thousand a week before long. And some day I would be turning down twenty-five hundred per unless they slipped me a quarter interest in the picture as well. And all for dressing beautifully and walking around in front of a camera for a few minutes a day—on days when I felt willing to. I picked up my horrid old seal-plush coat and flung it on me with an ermine gesture, and made my voice as bally English as Stricky's had been before he got to talking naturally.

"It's so awfully late for Stonybrook," I says, "that I'd really better slip along home!"

"All right!" says Stricky, jumping up and grabbing his lid. "I'll see Bonnie home, Bert, while you lock up. I'll be right back."

"I like your crust!" says Bert. "But I can take a hint when it's registered with an ax."

"Good night, Bert!" I says over my shoulder as I tucked my arm into Stricky's. "Remember you're a friend of mine!"

And then the two of us slipped out into the cold, wet street that didn't seem a bit either cold or nasty any more, but like the road to heaven or something. And as we walked along Stricky pulled a line of kid-

ding that would of done any girl's heart good if only they had been able to listen undividedly. But I couldn't, because of thinking what would I do when Stricky saw where I lived? What would I say? How would I get away with it? I was worried clean through.

"Say, listen, suppose I hadn't run up here to stay overnight with Bert!" Stricky was saying. "Just by accident, as one might say. And say, listen, do you know he had to drag me to that show by main force? What an escape, eh, baby? Say, I wouldn't have missed you for a million! And to think I imagined to-night was going to be punishment! You won't mind my speaking of it, Bonnie, but it's not only your looks, it's your class, that's got to me. Nothing small time about you! If there is one thing makes me glad, it's class, and you sure have got it!"

Well, I didn't feel any more like cheering when he says that than before. Because we had reached my home, and he would have to know the awful truth. The house was looming up before us now, right in the center of town, enormous and sort of spooky and vague. The closed shutters, especially the high-up ones in the mansard roof, give it a forbidding appearance, even at night, and the pair of iron stags on the wide lawn seemed sort of to move in the swaying light of the street lamp. The front was all dark of course, but down in the basement side entrance pop had left a lamp burning for me.

"Well, this is as far as I go!" I says, laughing nervously.

"What!" exclaimed Stricky. "Is this where you live? The biggest place in town, isn't it?"

"I guess so," I replied.

He didn't say anything at once, but somehow his manner changed. I could feel it even in the dark as he took my elbow politely and started piloting me up the tar path toward the front door.

"I'm really awfully glad to have met you, Miss Bonnie," he says, more in the manner he had used back in the hall. "I hope you won't think I've had an awful crust, the way I've talked. I had no idea—well—you are not going to forget me?"

"It's the other door—where the light is," I says. "And how can I forget you when I'm going to get a contract from you?"

"Of course!" says he. Then he took off his hat, very respectful and charming. "Good night," he says. "It's been delightful. You will hear from me soon."

"Good night, don't forget!" I says, and went in, closing the basement door behind me. I stood there against the wall a minute, listening to the sound of his footsteps going away down the quiet street and wondering what it was had changed him in those last few moments? Why the sudden respect? It wasn't cold feet, that was a cinch. It was awe. He was impressed. Good land! Impressed with the house! That was it. The enormous old show place of Stonybrook Center. I leaned back against the wall and laughed into my handkerchief so's pop wouldn't hear me. Way down the street somebody—Stricky, most

like—had begun to whistle sharp and clear, You'd be Surprised.

“I'll say he would,” I whispered, “if he knew pop and me was the caretakers here!”

CHAPTER III

AIN'T it funny how a person you have known all your life can tell you a thing again and again and you don't believe them, and then all of a sudden some perfect stranger blows in and pulls the same line and you take their word for it without even swallowing twice?

That's the way I was with Bert and Stricky. Dear old Bert! He was kind of lonesome in our town, I guess, on account of having too much artistic temperament to get along with the other inhabitants, yet not enough to get out and show them. So he picked on me as a method of self-expression, and had me all dated to do the things he'd always wanted to. I liked his believing in me. He was the only one in town that did, but I didn't believe he knew. And now the very snappiest, worldliest man that had ever shown around our parts came along and backed him up!

Well, when Stricky's fashionably shod footsteps had died away I took the lamp and started for my room, walking easy so's not to wake up pop. Of course we had just the basement of the house, but those four rooms was the only home I could remember, pop having got the job of looking after the place when mom died. And a lucky thing for us that Milton Sherrill decided to keep the house from sentiment, even though the family was all dead but him, and he

lived out in California himself, only coming East once in a great while.

Pop had accepted this caretaking job because it was easier than earning rent money. Mr. Sherrill didn't pay pop for looking after things, but rent free is rent free, and pop, I suppose, did the work until I was big enough to, though I can hardly remember such a time. I couldn't have been more than seven years old the first day I cleaned the brass on the front door of my own accord, inspired by Milton Sherrill's photograph, which I had swiped out of the parlor upstairs and put on my bureau.¹ The owner had an awful nice face, and had been about twenty years old when Bert made this cabinet photo of him. I used to think Milton smiled appreciatively whenever I took especial care of his dead mother's things. Anyways I kidded myself along like that, making a regular hero out of him and doing more than I really needed to.

Well, my bedroom was what had been the servants' dining room in the old days, and this night I crept across the kitchen to it without disturbing anybody but a few mice in the wall, and set the lamp down on the dresser in front of Milton Sherrill's faded old photo, which I still kept there. But I hardly noticed it. All it meant to me just then was that it stood guard to my amateur but absolutely secret safe-deposit vault. Large as it was I wanted to reassure myself with a flash at what I had parked away in the little drawer against which Milton was leaning so smilingly. So I flecked him aside and, digging under my pair of white gloves and my two veils, my sample of French

perfume and my real lace handkerchief, took out my savings-bank book, opened it, made sure the last total really said four hundred berries, give the blessed numerals a hearty good-night kiss, and stuck the stuff all back where it belonged.

I didn't pull off a great deal of sleep, however, but lay a long time staring at the bars of light the street lamp threw on the ceiling, acting out all kinds of scenes in my mind, where I turned down leading producers, refused to marry millionaires, and had my maid cleaning my jewels, and so forth. Incidentally, I sure hated myself for having saved every cent that had come my way for the last four years! Because, as far as I had heard, they weren't giving away tickets to Los Angeles that season. Sweet daddy, some dreams, I had! And then the first thing I knew, I was sitting up in bed, realizing that the bell I heard was not the Prince of Wales calling on the telephone, but the alarm clock remarking that the kitchen stove went out if neglected after six o'clock.

I took the hint, still in the magic haze which had sprung up around me last night. And as I dressed I looked out of the barred window at the dead grass and old leaves that pop had for two months now been considering raking up. I shivered as I looked. The basement window brought the lawn about level with my nose and I could smell its damp odor even through the glass. Down at the depot the 6.05 was whistling. Stricky would be going out on that. He'd have to, if he was leaving first thing, like he'd said, for we only had one morning train out that time of year.

Stricky on his way to California—where they had sun and flowers and—oh, gee—everything!

The thought didn't make me sore or depressed, though. I remembered the contract that was coming to me, and deliberately switched my mind to coal scuttles and fried eggs.

"Get on the job, B. McFadden," I told myself, sticking my curls under a winter-weight boudoir cap that I used, not to keep my brains warm as might be supposed, but because yellow hair gets dirty so easy. "Calm down now, and do to-day's job to-day, and tomorrow will dope itself out!"

With which words of wisdom I started fixing up the eats, and pretty soon the smell of coffee drew pop's handsome curly head out of his room.

"Is that yourself stirring about, Bonnie dear?" he says, following his head and pulling his regular daily line. "Sure I didn't know it was this late! I meant to have a scuttle of coal up for you this morning!"

"Thanks, pop," I said. "Come on and eat now. The train is in and the papers will be over to the store soon. We don't want them to be late getting around again!"

"Sure and I'm on me way!" says pop, languidly dropping into his place and settling down for a comfortably chatty meal, in that exasperating style of his. "Give us some coffee, my pretty! That's the girl! Well, Bonnie, what on earth did you want to go and make a show out of yourself for like that, last night?"

"Whatter you mean, pop?" I says. "I got a right to go out with Bert and his friend if I want!"

"Sure that part was all right," he agreed, swooping down on a third egg. "Girls should have the boys runnin' after them. It's only nature! I mean all that tearin' around on the stage, like you done!"

"That was supposed to be a movie, pop!" I says. "I thought it was pretty good, myself, and so did some other parties!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" says pop. "Keep your mind on your cooking and it'll fetch you a better husband!"

"So you don't think I got any talent?" I says.

"No talent at all!" he says cheerfully. "And why would you? Not but that you're a good girl and a fine daughter to me, Bonnie!"

"I'll say I am!" I remarked with spirit. "And as for acting, I guess I got as good grounds for acting as Pickford or anybody. I've got the wish to."

"There, now, don't get excited!" says pop, reprov-ing me with his teaspoon. "Take your mind off such nonsense when there is serious matters to discuss."

"What now?" I asked, real sharp. "Have you been playing pool again? How much?"

"No, daughter dear!" says pop, flashing that win-ning smile of his at me. Pop sure was a beauty, what with his six feet of height, and if a trifle too heavy now, his blond curly head and his smile, the both of which I have inherited from him, could melt the heart of a stone, or of a woman who considered he abused her. Which is even more.

"It's not pool, Bonnie dear," he says. "It's the mortgage on the shop itself I'm thinking of. It'll be due in another two weeks and it's time to consider the

matter of where will we get the money. Have you thought?"

"I've thought of this, pop," I says—"and not for the first time, either—that if you was to do a little work we wouldn't be broke all the time!"

Pop's face fell. He pursed his lips and shook his head sadly.

"I know it, Bonnie, I know it!" he said. "God love ye, I'd like to make a lot of money and leave you live like a lady. But where can I get the chance in this forsaken town? And business all over the country is terrible—it's fierce! Why, only the other day I was reading a piece——"

"And only the other year you were telling me you couldn't get work on account of the war!" I says. "And next year it'll be impossible to find a job on account of business being so good! Why don't you show a little ambition? Do you expect to catch a fortune just by sitting still and letting it mistake you for bait?"

"Well, and what would you suggest, since you're so smart, eh?" says pop, undisturbed. "Sure, I'll act on anything you say!"

Well, I had to think hard for a minute or two before I could answer that, because this conversation was one which we had not more than twice a month, regular, and my stock of suggestions had run kind of low. But I wouldn't let him stump me, not while there was some ideas floating around in the world free for anyone with a grain of sense to catch. I rattled the dishes in the sink, hurrying to catch up with

my work, and, as usual, doing the job on hand and doing it good brought results in more than one way.

"I got an idea!" I says. "Do you know Jake Johnson, that Swede that's taken up the old Benson farm, had to send all the way to New Haven for the tractor he bought?"

"Well, what of that?" says pop.

"There isn't an agent on this territory," I says. "And there's a chance to sell tractors here. Why don't you jump in and get the agency before the boys at the garage think of it?"

"That's a smart idea!" says pop brightly. "And the work will just suit me. I know as much about mechanics as the next feller, and I'm a fair salesman, at that! All I'd have to do is to talk 'em into buying, and pocket the commission!"

"That's it!" I says, with the faint hope that always would spring up in me every time we had a conference. "You could make a big success of it, pop. We'll write to the New Haven agency to-night."

"We will that!" says pop. "And I ought easy to sell one or two before old Bushwell comes down on us for his money!"

Then he shuffled off across the street to where Pike's boy with his bicycle was already waiting for the Clarions, and for a while I stood there looking after pop, half mad and half tender. The handsome, lazy hulk! I'd drive him to work yet!

He went into the ramshackle little old shed of a store, Pike's boy following him, and I took off my cap and wrapper, slipped into my one-piece model of

black serge with the tassels that I had copied out of one of the fashion magazines we carried on our news stand, and then I done pop's round of the house upstairs, which I made every night and morning just to be sure everything was O.K.

If I do say so, that house was kept in A1 condition. Everything had been left just like it was when old Mrs. Sherrill died, and it was furnished complete. Out of the ark, I guess, for the stuff was not real old antiques, which I like pretty well, especially the clean new ones that they make nowadays. The Sherrill furniture was mostly of a sort of Mumps design, the plush being puffed way out in the wrong place like a swelling, but intended to be like that; and the wood was mostly black walnut carved with a crochet needle, by the looks of it. Flowered carpets with flowers bigger even than a Californian could claim for his native state was on the floor, and the one bathroom was done in Early Tintype.

Just the same, the enormous rooms, with the heavy window curtains, the thick carpets and the homely, expensive furniture always give me a sort of thrill when I walked through. When I was a kid I used to think these was the most beautiful rooms in the world, but that was before pop added Country Houses to the magazines on our stand. And even yet I had a sort of pleasure in the rooms because they always seemed like they was haunted by Milton. I figured he must be a pretty nice sort of bird to keep his mother's house that way, and you could kind of feel that he thought about the place often. I remembered the last time he was

home, a grave, quiet sort of man, you couldn't tell how old he was, standing there and telling pop how much he liked the way the place was looked after, and pop swelling out his shirt and accepting all the praise.

I, a kid of less than twelve years old, but the real author of all this cleanness, had hid behind the door, peeking at them and getting no more credit than a picture actor out of work! But I was trembling while I listened to the owner, talking so grave, in a deep voice like the lowest-toned bell in our chimes. I worshiped Milton Sherrill, and why not? I didn't know one thing about him.

This day, though, as I straightened out the candlesticks with the glass dingle-dangles on the parlor mantel and pulled the hand-painted window shades down even, Mr. Sherrill seemed only a ghostly dream, and instead of him I thought of the warm, real Stricky.

I held a long talk with Stricky, in my imagination, pulling all the clever gags I hadn't thought of last night while he was around, and walking with my refined *débutante* droop, which I had forgotten to use. And then I heard pop yell from across the street to come and say how many coupons went with three packages of Extra Cut Tobacco for Mr. Schoonmacker. So I says "Pardon me, Stricky, old thing—don't forget the contract—ta ta!" and slammed out of the house and over to the store before pop could ruin the first sale of the morning.

There isn't a child living but what has helped to raise their parents; that's a fact. But probably few have had more difficult ones than pop. Hardly had I

got over to the store than pop discovered he had to go down street. Well, he had to, I knew that. He was obliged to go and hold up the left-hand side of the post-office front door, because if he was to miss a day after all these years very likely the building would cave in. But I didn't say anything except all right, and set to work unpacking a box of lollypops that had just come, and arranging them like a bouquet in a vase on the counter. And then all I had to do was the accounts, the cleaning up, a little stock taking, and I was free to sit down between the airtight stove and the magazine stand, where I could toast my toes on the one and reach the other easily, with all the time in the world to read, and no interruptions except now and then a customer.

When one came I would struggle to my feet and make a big sale like a bag of tobacco or three one-cent stamps. Usually we done at least a dollar's worth of business before noon, but not always. And so I would sit and reach for the magazines, one after another, until what I didn't know about the real world, the world that sets the standards, wasn't worth bothering over.

Ain't it remarkable the educational influences we got put up in magazine form? I never looked at the cheap fiction stuff, hardly. I deliberately let it lie while I pried off a lot of culture. I knew exactly what was to be wore as quick as any New York City girl did, and how the Vanderbilts looked on the Avenue, and what breed of dog was all the rage. I was familiar with the appearance of the special Booster

Body Colby-Droit that had been built for the governor of Howcome, China, and What the Well Dressed Man is to Avoid. I knew about paneled drawing-rooms, could recognize a Chinese rug on sight and was familiar with the names of leading gift shops, tea rooms and real-estate dealers all over the country; and if that isn't the highest degree of modern American culture I don't know what is.

This day, however, it was the moving-picture papers that got to me. I read them in a new light, and figured how would I look among them myself. I got to dreaming over them so deep that I was almost scared to death when pop come in, banging the door and wanting to know where was dinner.

That brought me down to earth all right. I flew back to the house, and over the stove and the boiled dinner which I had simmering on the back of it my stock took a awful slump. This was brought about by pop. During the meal he was just as cheerful and charming as ever, but his first words, as I helped him to cabbage, kind of took all the pep out of me.

CHAPTER IV

"I BEEN thinking over that tractor idea, Bonnie darlin'," he says, "and I'm afraid it is no good, after all. Schoonmacker says he thinks I could get the agency all right, but how about demonstrating the blame thing? I'd have to be off in the backwoods working one for the benefit of some farmer, and strainin' me back or something, and then in the end perhaps make no sale after all!"

"Well, you'd have to work for a sale of course!" I says. "What do you expect?"

"Besides, I couldn't leave the store very well," pop went on. "And it would tie me up badly, in case something big turned up."

"I see!" I says, short. Not that I had honestly thought pop would go through with the plan. "I see," says I. "But how about the mortgage that's coming due on the store?"

"Oh, that!" says pop airily, relieved at having made another successful escape. "I made a mistake about that!"

"How?" says I breathlessly.

"It's due next week, not two weeks from now," says pop. "I had the date wrong."

I laid down my knife at that. Believe me, I couldn't eat another mouthful.

"Pop!" I says. "What on earth'll you do?"

"Oh, old Bushwell will let it ride again for a while, I dare say!" says pop cheerfully. "He's a decent old feller!"

"No, he won't, pop!" I cried, real excited now. "You know he said he'd foreclose, and I don't blame him! He's had patience enough! You got an idea that by laying down on folks you can just naturally make them carry you! But you'll do it once too often, lemme tell you!"

"Sush, Bonnie dear, don't raise your voice," says pop, with all the gentleness and patience in the world. "Haven't I often told you a loud voice wasn't lady-like?"

"I don't care!" I shouted angrily. "I'm no lady! I'm a slave, that's what I am, and I'm fed up with it! If you won't help me by going to work I won't help you by working for you—so there!"

"Sure, darling, and you know I'd work for you if I could find anything to do," pop declared smoothly. "Any one would think I had no affection for you at all! And you the smart young girl that you are! Why, who but a clever girl would of saved the money you have, Bonnie? Eh?"

There was a little silence then.

"What money?" I says sullenly.

"Well, I know they paid you twenty-five dollars for the photo you posed for Sweet-breath Tooth Paste," says pop, counting on his fingers. "And then there's the subscriptions you've been taking in for Tropics; the commissions must be amounting to seventy-five dollars by now. That's a hundred, and——"

"Hold on, pop!" I says fiercely, getting to my feet and shoving back from the table while I glared at him across that hateful sippy food. "Hold on—that's my money—my very own. Don't you dast to think you can touch it!"

"But, good heaven, child dear," says pop. "You haven't spent it?"

"I have not, and I'm not going to!" I says. "I give you my work in the store and run the house and never get a cent for it, and if I do extra work outside, that money is mine!"

"Come here, darling!" says pop. "Sure; of course it's your own money! Who would deny it? But you wouldn't let the little shop go? Where would we get any living at all without it?"

I'll say pop had honey in his voice. Some said it was the blarney stone, but here was one time when it listened more like crushed gravel to me. Ordinarily he could of wheedled me. He'd been all I had until last night, and a woman has got to have some man to make a fool of herself over, even if he is only a kind of half-baked father. This was plainly my cue to save the old home shop, rescue my dependent parent, and play a heavy lead in my own home town. But somehow the first move was never made. The director had yelled "Lights! Camera! Shoot!" but the star didn't come on.

Instead I just stood there quiet, pop with his arm around my waist, smiling at me in that sure way of his, and little knowing what was fermenting in my bean. And as I looked at him it come over me abso-

lutely clearly for the first time that pop was full of health. He wasn't a day over forty-three, and not a thing ailed him but the habit of refusing to do anything for himself as long as there was anybody to double for him.

And as I kept on staring I also all of a sudden saw the reflection of a young woman—a grown woman—in his eyes. It was myself of course. Something wild and hot flamed up in me then, and no mother animal ever defended her young like I did my savings. I actually felt like I was hugging them to me and growling. If I give them up I was lost. Pop was cooing at me again.

“Well, now—when will you pay it off?” he was saying.

I give him a straight look then, and came back at him like a shot.

“Never!” I says.

Pop give a laugh and got to his feet.

“Yes, you will, Bonnie dearie,” he says. “Why, you wouldn't let us be ruined when you have the money in hand!”

“Us!” I says. But he didn't seem to hear.

“Well, I've got to be going now,” says he. “If you need me for anything at the store I'll be down to the poolroom until the 5.11 goes out, and I'll be at the depot for that.”

“All right, pop,” I says listlessly, never moving until he was gone. Then, disregarding the store entirely, I sat down on the nearest place—the edge of the table it was—and thought hard.

Funny how money affects life, ain't it? Busts up any kind of relationship that abuses it in any way. Look at me and pop! Or any friend you have loaned it to! The demand that I give pop my kale was what finally opened my eyes to him. And one of the first things I realized was that I had been kidding myself about being good to him. I hadn't really been good to pop. In making things easy for him I'd pretty near made it impossible for him to help himself. If I was to go away and leave him flat he'd have to work or starve, and I knew how well he liked to eat—none better! I was all that stood between him and work, and I was about to move. Where he'd land I didn't know. I didn't honestly care just then, either.

When a person who isn't accustomed to handling big decisions actually does make one it is a good idea to act prompt, before something influences you against your true instinctive judgment. I was going to Los Angeles. That much had been decided before Stricky saw me home last night. I was under age, and if pop really wanted to he could take my money away from me. The answer was to go at once. Of course on the other hand I had not wanted to start until I had my contract in hand. But what difference did that really make? Stricky had said in front of Bert, that he would give me one, and what did I care if he sent it back home to me or if I signed in his office out West? Either way would be just as good.

But if the truth is to be known, it wasn't any noble motives about saving pop from himself or making a fortune to restore our family to a position we never

had that decided me to do like I did. It was sheer terror that pop would get around me if he knew in advance. I made up my mind he shouldn't know until the last minute, when it would be too late.

My heart beat so hard it nearly smothered me, but I slid off the table and stood firmly on my feet. I would go to-day! On the 5.11. Instinctively I started gathering up the dirty dishes, and then I put 'em back—cold, greasy food and all.

"Let him wash 'em!" I says aloud. "He's eaten off them and gone free often enough!" Then I looked at the clock and commenced some rapid planning.

It was after one already, but the bank would be open until three. I grabbed up my coat, flopped poor Milt over on his face, dug out my bank book like a terrier looking for bones, and half an hour later I was back with my money.

Alone in my disordered room I fussed about where to hide it, trying each compartment of my purse, but there was too much. Then I remembered something I had read some place, and stuck the main roll into my stocking. You see I was starting out right. Then I commenced packing less important things, beginning with the cabinet photo of Milton Sherrill and ending with a handful of samples of toilet soap, cold cream and tooth paste which had luckily come in the day before. I didn't go near the store all afternoon, but I heard the bell over there jangle a couple of times as disgusted customers went away, and once I peeked through the front window and seen Bert Green coming away from there in a wild sort of manner, drop-

ping the glasses off his nose as he run down the steps.

The sight of him reminded me that I wished I'd of had time to get a set of pictures of myself from him to take along as samples in case I needed them. But it was too late to bother now. I decided, while cramming my old spring suit into my second bag, that as soon as I was in a position to I would show my appreciation for all he had done in introducing me to Strick and so forth, by sending on for Bert to come out and be my camera man. Just now I couldn't even stop to say good-by. It was almost dusk when I struggled out into the street carrying my two heavy bags.

Night comes down awful early in Stonybrook after November sets in, and a few lights was already lit in the houses here and there, although it wasn't but five minutes to five. The street was pretty well deserted, too, for the loafers was already gone down to see the express come in, and pop was evidently an early arrival, or so I could safely guess from the fact that there was nobody up in Bill Kelly's pool palace over the drug store, although the lights were lit there.

I was glad to have the street to myself because I wasn't looking for any delay just then. And here is where I missed my cue the second time in one day, for instead of the tears running down my cheeks at saying farewell to my home town, my heart aching at the thought of leaving, and etcetera, my mind was chiefly on would I make the train and was my nose powdered right?

There was quite a crowd at the depot that night,

and I could see pop looming up big among them out on the front platform as I came in the back way and bought me a ticket as far as New York, knowing that to try for one the whole way to Los Angeles would only cause delay, and the time was short. I had exactly three minutes to wait after I stuck the ticket into my purse and picked my bags up again. Then I caught sight of Bert. He was fortunately busy over at the express-office window, but he smiled and nodded as he called out to me.

"Say, Bonnie, you look immense!" he says. "I'll be with you in a minute!"

The train was roaring in by now, the sound of it smothering everything else. I waited as long as I dared to, and then, with just barely time to board it, I hustled out on the platform, across the first line of tracks, and threw my bags up on the platform of the nearest car. A brakeman lifted me up after them, and jumped on the steps himself, swinging his lantern and calling 'Board!' in a loud voice. I looked back over his shoulder, and it was then that pop caught sight of me.

"Hey, Bonnie! What are you up to?" he shouted, detaching himself from the group of bums against the station wall and lumbering down the platform towards me.

"Come out of that!" he yelled. "Where and the devil do you think you are going?"

The train was moving by now. Oh, so awful slowly!

"I'm going away!" I says, sharp and clear. "I'm fed up, and I'm going for good! You'll never see me again!"

"Stop that damn train!" pop shouted wrathfully. "Stop it and come out of that, you young hussy, or I'll beat the life out of you!"

Bert had heard the row by this time, and he, too, started for the train. It was moving faster every second, and he, pushing pop aside, had to run pantingly alongside of it in order to speak to me.

"Bonnie!" he cried. "I tried three times this afternoon to see you! Where are you going, Bonnie?"

Then his glasses fell off and his long hair blew back and he sure did look funny and undignified.

"I'm going to Hollywood!" I shouted. "Look out, Bert, you'll get hurt!"

"Hollywood!" he called, suddenly looking scared to death almost. "Bonnie—you must not go! What I wanted to tell you was something about Greg Strickland!"

Then he collided with my father, who come running up, and the last I saw of them they was both hurled back upon the station platform as the train carried me off into the night.

CHAPTER V

I HAVE always claimed that nobody can get something for nothing in this world, but a railroad's receiving money for the upper berth in a sleeping car comes pretty close to that. Like a lot of folks who have never traveled much I thought taking one would be a economy. And maybe I did save, for I don't really know how much should a person count as overhead, meaning ruining my only good hat against the ceiling through climbing up there with it on the first night out of New York, and the engine being seized with a convulsive fit of coughing immediately after. Or how great an amount travelers are accustomed to charging off to general wear and tear. And by wear I mean acquiring a Jacob's ladder in my best silk stocking climbing down the Pullman ladder, and tear being occasioned when I saved myself from being flung bodily into the Grand Cañon of the Colored Porter by grabbing at a real filet-lace blouse which had got hung on the hook by the filet part. Well anyways, when I come to figure it up, by saving twelve dollars on the berth I was out about twenty-five in other matters.

The morning after my arrival in New York, it sure was necessary for me to go easy with my cash, for when I had bought my ticket to Los Angeles and telegraphed Stricky not to send my contract East because I was on my way, my roll looked like it had

been dieting. But I forgot all that when I walked down the platform at the Grand Central Station and saw the Wolverine actually waiting for me—for me! Sweet daddy, that was some sensation!

I was the first one in the car, but pretty soon people commenced arriving, and I don't suppose there is anything more interesting, hardly, than sizing up the ones you are going to take a long train trip with, and dreading which is going to share your section. I was all keyed up for the worst, but hoping that if no one showed for the lower, why maybe I could slip the porter four bits and use it myself. Every time a woman with a baby and six bags or so come in I would have a nervous chill, because although fond of children I felt I would be less so on a sleeper. But nobody came anywheres near me, although many passed by with looks which caused me to clutch at my bags politely. The car grew hot and commenced to smell of damp coats and raw apples. And then at the very last moment two really snappy people come in, a man and a girl.

The man, who was tall and good-looking and about thirty-five in a fur-lined overcoat, took three real genuine leather bags with him into the drawing-room. Something about him caught my eye and held the same. I felt I had seen him before, but I couldn't place where. He had class, all right. Big time. A millionaire, that's the way I had him figured, when he shut his drawing-room door, and I realized that the girl, who I had at first thought she was with him, was with me, instead.

She had stopped at my section, which was at once

plainly more hers than mine, and stood there giving my bags and me a rancid look the way a person does when they breeze in and find that somebody else has actually dared to buy the other ticket.

This girl was also a blonde—a whiter one than me, with bobbed hair, curled with an iron, light blue eyes with beads on the white lashes, a black crêpe dress sloshing with steel beads, and a pair of stockings built on the chicken principle. I mean chicken soup. You know the kind where they pass a chicken through the kitchen to flavor it? Well, a silkworm had give one glance at her legs. Lord knows what she wore in summer!

“Boy!” says she to the porter. “Put my things here! I have the lower!” And she gave him a dollar. A bean—one entire rug—for staggering in with a ten-inch black leather dressing case, a box of candy and seven magazines!

Well, that made me feel about like a second-hand shrimp, and we didn't talk for a while after she had sat down all over her seat, and the train at last begun to move. You know the way it is. A person starts on a long train journey with all the exclusiveness in the world, and about the second day out they have all the exclusiveness of the average sardine. But anyways, she and I looked quite a while before we spoke.

“Going far?” she says at last, smothering a yawn with a copy of *Closeups* she had with her. I put my own copy down, glad to be friendly, even if I could feel her putting price tags on every stitch I wore while she talked.

"To California!" I says impressively. But I missed fire.

"So am I," she says composedly. "Hollywood!"

I sat up in my backwards seat like a shot.

"So am I!" I echoed. "Are you in pictures?"

"Yes," says she. Then after a little pause, "In a way," she added, looking me through and through, kind of hard and cold. "What are you going out there for?"

"I am going for the pictures too," I says. "I got a contract with Silvermount."

All at once little Crystal Icicle's manner changed. She smiled at me in the sweetest way, and even before I could qualify my remark, which I hadn't really meant it to be a lie, but it had just sprung spontaneously to my lips the way those things will with strangers, she leaned forward and put one hand on my knee.

"No!" she says. "Ain't that interesting! I wonder if you could help me to get in, dear?"

Whatter you know! I was knocked so cold that I just sat like a regular dumb-bell and let her gurgle on.

"You see, I'm not exactly in the pictures yet," she explained. "But I've got no end of talent. Everybody in our town thinks I have. So I decided to go out to Los and take a chance. There's big money in pictures, and lots of girls get it easy!"

"Yes, so I've heard!" I managed to get out, seeing at the same time that the hat was probably home-made after all.

"But I don't know a soul there," she went on. "I'm going on a gamble, but I'm going to play for big

things. If a girl has got lots of jazz to her, and expensive clothes, and spends freely, she ought to get by, don't you think?"

"I can't think so quick as that!" I says.

"Well," says she, "I had over three hundred dollars saved, so I spent sixty on this dress, bought my ticket, and here I am!"

She laughed a little, nervously, crossed those gossamer legs of hers, and leaned back in her seat looking like a million dollars, but actually less well off than myself.

"So if you know anybody with influence, honey," she says, "I'd love an introduction."

Well, I suppose here is where I should of confessed just exactly how things was. But I didn't. To begin with, as I have since learned, there is something about pictures which causes pretty nearly everybody who touches them to exaggerate. I suppose because picture figures and facts are so big in reality that a person gets subconsciously to feeling why not make 'em even better? So I let sleeping dogs dream on.

"Well," I says casually, "I could introduce you to the casting director at Silvermount."

"Say, you're a peach if you will!" says the girl. "My name is Gertie Gross. Professional name, Anita Lauber."

"I am Bonnie McFadden," I says. "Professional name unknown!"

"Oh, no! Don't say that, Miss McFadden!" says Anita so earnestly that honest, I just hated to disillusion her.

"But it is unknown," I insisted. "I'm only beginning. To tell the whole truth this is my first contract."

I could see my stock fall a little then, but I knew a casting director, and that was enough.

"Well, you're in luck to be going out on contract!" says Miss Lauber. "Whereabouts do you come from, dear?"

I told her. Well, I made it sound just a little better than it was, perhaps. But any home seems that way, once you are far enough off from it.

"That's funny!" says she. "We seem to be starting out pretty near even. Both blondes and I'll say about the same age, although I'm a little bit younger, maybe. Both from small towns. My home is in Southington, New Jersey. Mommer owns the bakery."

"What do you think is the best way to get by in pictures?" I says.

"Pep!" she says promptly. "Pep, at any cost. And get a few men to boost you. You know how it is with a girl on her own. She's generally out of luck, don't you think?"

"Not if she can deliver the goods," I says. "Any more than a boy on his own."

"Well, here's hoping!" Miss Lauber says with a laugh. "I intend to have a big time anyways!"

I didn't say nothing against that because what was the use starting an argument with four days in the same section still ahead of us? I might have the upper berth, but I had also intuition and tact, so I switched the talk to exchanging opinions on well-known stars and what was wrong with their work, and it's a pity

they couldn't of been there so's to benefit by what we said, for we was frank and merciless. Then we ate together and after that we come back to our car, which had become a swaying forest of green curtains. All this time I hadn't even got one more look at the big egg in the drawing-room but only a waiter coming out of there with a pretty well wrecked tray.

"Did you notice him?" says Anita, for by now we were of course on first-name terms. "The john in the private room?"

"I'll say I did!" I says. "Pretty soft, traveling like that!"

"We ought to make him," says Anita, "sometime to-morrow!"

Well, I didn't reply to that, either, except to say "Good-night" which she could take anyways she wanted. I had even then discovered that a good way to keep friends is to pass by a number of their remarks. I just climbed the stepladder, did a Houdini out of my clothes, and lay down in a sudden awful lonesomeness. I wanted pop and Ella and Bert and everybody. I wondered if I wasn't maybe the biggest darn fool that had ever run away from home. It seemed to me that if I couldn't see the home folks that minute I should die. And then all of a sudden I remembered that I had one of them right with me, and struggling up I reached for my bag at the foot of the berth, drew out Milton Sherrill's photo, and crawled back under the covers with it, holding it close to me and feeling comforted right away.

I don't know if you know how it is, but every girl

has a dream-ideal lover, and Milt was mine. He was as real to me as anything. I had him a courteous gallant gentleman, full of high ideals, chivalry, money and love. To my mind he had everything but wings, and as the matter was entirely in my own hands I had give him golf clubs instead, because of preferring that sort of man. This image which I had made of him was what had kept me off the boys around Stonybrook. They all seemed such clowns alongside of him that I could not feel real interested in any of them. So you can imagine that as soon as I had hold of Milt's picture my heart eased up considerably. I even went so far as to feel that he would O.K. my running away from Stonybrook to become somebody big in the world, for he had done it himself and would understand. And thinking this I somehow went to sleep.

When I woke up early next morning I did so from having made up my mind in advance that I would. You see it come to me that it might be a good idea to get ahead of the crowd and make a dash for the washroom before anybody else got started. And I'll say it turned out to be a good idea, too, because there was only seven women there ahead of me.

When I was neat but not laundered, the way a person traveling has to be, I was so hungry I just naturally couldn't wait for Anita. Her curtains was still closed, and so I beat it back to the diner alone, and the captain led me to the only empty place in the car—a seat at a table where a man was already absorbing cereal.

The waiter drew out the empty chair, shoved me

into it quick, and give me a menu and pad like he was handing out examination papers. I looked at the menu first, and then I naturally looked up to see what the man opposite me was eating, and then I got a shock, because he was the one from the drawing-room in our car, and soon as I saw him face to face I knew him. It was Milton Sherrill.

CHAPTER VI

WELL, I suppose it's my cue to say at first I couldn't believe it, but here's where I miss again. I believed my eyes, and my memory, too, right off the reel. His face was too familiar for there to be the slightest chance of a mistake. Hadn't I been talking to him about all kinds of intimate things for years? Didn't he know every secret I had, and every ambition? Hadn't I been watching after his mother's things for him and asking him every so often how he'd like it done? I'll say I had! Why, I even realized that deep down in me I had known him last night when he stood in his drawing-room door, tipping the porter. And there he was, after me knowing him so well for such a long time, sitting opposite to me, a perfect stranger!

I could tell from the way he looked up at me over his oatmeal that he didn't have any idea who I was. Of course that was natural, as he had never seen me except when I was a little bit of a kid. But his eyes were friendly. As a matter of fact I guess he seemed stranger to me than I to him. Sweet daddy, it was some shock! If a person has been dreaming of floating on clouds and wakes up to a hair mattress, however good, there is a big difference. He was Milton Sherrill, all right, but more as God had made him than as I had.

Well, while I sat there like a dumb-bell Milt's ex-

pression registered "Nice-looking-girl but I don't know the child," and went back to the oats, because he was no chicken hunter, anybody could see that; and no fresh drummer, either, but a high-class wealthy citizen, very dignified in made-to-order clothes. Hastily I looked away and wrote "One boiled egg, glass of milk" like I was sending a desperate telegram, and the waiter snatched it and read it out in a loud voice that mortified me, especially when he shouted "Ain't you gwine ter have no bread?" and went away while I wondered nervously what would I do.

Of course my dream had suffered, but still and all I didn't want to lose Milt, or rather Mr. Sherrill, as his actual presence instantly made him seem. If I didn't speak soon my opening would maybe be gone. So I decided to take a chance, and said "Ahem." But Mr. Sherrill only turned his newspaper and coaxed another spoonful behind it. I was desperate.

"Pardon me," I says at last, "are you Mr. Milton Sherrill?" Of all the boob questions!

"What the—— I beg your pardon. Yes, I am!" he answered, putting the paper down so prompt I could tell he had been taking more notice of me than I had give him credit for.

"I am Bonnie McFadden, Mr. Sherrill," I says, and waited. He didn't get it.

"McFadden?" he says, polite and smiling, but puzzled.

"Stonybrook," I says.

"Stonybrook?" he repeated, a light breaking. "Why, there's an old chap on my place, but ——"

"Yeh, I know!" I said. "That's pop. I'm the kid."

"How amazing!" he says. "And how delightful!"

Well, his smile sure was pleasant! And as I looked at it I begun to feel like a quitter. For who would take care of his mother's house, now that I was gone? Gee, I hoped he'd fire pop if pop didn't brace up and do the right thing.

"I know every inch of your home, you see!" I told him. "I've dusted it often enough to, anyways!"

"You don't look it a particle!" he blurted out. "I say, that wasn't an awfully tactful remark, was it? But you've rather taken me off my feet!"

"How about me?" I says. "I'm a little jolted by this meeting myself!"

"Where are you going?" was his next question.

I told him Los Angeles, and he frowned, looking older.

"Are you a motion-picture actress?" he asked.

"Not yet," I said. "But I will be as soon as I get there."

"Well, I suppose it is natural that you should want to do it," he said. "But it seems a pity, somehow."

"My stars, why?" I asked, my eyes popping open. It would be awful if Mr. M. Sherrill turned out to be a crab!

"Oh, the life, and what not!" he says. "So artificial. You are obliged to do something for a living, though, I suppose?"

"Of course I am!" I says. "And I would anyhow!"

Well, he approved of that, for he smiled again and shot a keen, friendly look at me from under his heavy brows.

"One does, these days!" he says. "I say, if you have finished, shall we go back into the observation car? I want to hear all about Stonybrook. I was disappointed at not getting a chance to run out there this trip. How did you leave your father?"

"Rather hastily," I says, getting up and following him out.

And after we had bounced down a corridor or two we came into the observation car, which was almost empty, and took seats beside each other.

"Now tell me!" says Milton.

I took my mind off my disappointment in him for having dared to grow so much older, and told him everything, from how I had repainted the iron stags last year, to how I loved the portrait of his mother over the parlor mantel. I guess I must of spoke real enthusiastic and earnest, and he got it. His face grew younger and softer as he listened to me, putting in a question now and then and the first thing you knew he was all sort of warmed up. I commenced to think he was pretty nice, though not the romantic style, of course, like Stricky.

About an hour later Anita came tripping into the observation car, looking for me or anybody. When she saw Mr. Sherrill and I, she give all the signs of having found what she was after, and only very reluctantly backed off on my signal, which I had to repeat several times. But finally she did go, making

a face which said "Stingy" as plain as if she had shouted it.

As for Mr. Sherrill, it just seemed as if he couldn't get enough of my description and news and so forth. But after a while he pulled out a thin gold watch and got to his feet.

"My dear child, do you know that we shall be in Chicago in twenty minutes?" says he. "What line do you go out on—the Union? That's my way too. But we don't leave until late this afternoon. Will you let me take you to lunch somewhere?"

Would I? Sweet daddy! Would I like to walk around with a million dollars!

"Why, yes, thanks," I says with one and one-half ounces of hesitation.

Then I walked on air back to my section, where Anita was putting the finishing touch to her lips, through her veil.

"Well!" she says. "So you flagged him first, eh?"

"He's an old friend of pop's!" I snapped back indignantly.

"That one came out of the ark," remarked Anita. "Hustle now, dear; we are nearly in. You can tell me all about it at lunch."

"No, I can't," I says. "I'm—well, I'm lunching with him, and he really is what I say." And then the porter came looking for our tips and bags and things.

I had dinner with him, too, that night on the limited, but I ducked breakfast next morning because I was ashamed of his paying all those checks. However,

he come and found me at lunch time and asked Anita as well, and we ate it flying across the prairie, and after that I give up all resistance and let him feed me. My whole idea of America come to be Milton Sherrill cornfields and corn flakes through Illinois; Milton Sherrill roast lamb and roast beef through the sheep and cattle country. And in between mealtimes, Milton Sherrill and talk about everything under the sun pretty nearly. Isn't it a fact a train can make you acquainted quicker than almost any other place except maybe jail?

On the second day out I again felt I had known him as he was all my life. Things were either right or wrong to Mr. Sherrill, and that was all there was to it. About the pictures, especially. He didn't like anything about the pictures, and he didn't care for me going into them either.

"Look here, Miss McFadden!" he says over one of our small coffees the third night out. "Look here, Miss McFadden, I've only known you for a few days, but I really am a friend, and I'm going to speak accordingly. Why do you go into the moving-picture game?"

"Why not?" I says. "It's my ambition."

"Well, but look here!" he says. "Have you any idea of the sort of thing you are going to run up against?"

"I've got an idea I can act, and that I can sell that talent for a fair price," I says. "Outside of which I guess I can take care of myself. Why do you pick on the pictures so?"

"Personally, I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole," says he. "I mean for myself, and I hope none of my interests will ever become involved in the industry!"

"But," I says, "if I get a good contract?"

"I don't know," said he, "except that the contract may not be good. Look here, now! Why run amuck of that crowd? Why not forget pictures and come to San Francisco instead, and work for me?"

"Why, Mr. Sherrill!" I says, and I'll say I really was as surprised as I looked. "Why, Mr. Sherrill, how do you know I would be any good?"

"Because it is my business to know people," he says with a confident little smile, much as Stricky had recommended his own judgment. "The head of a great banking concern has to be a judge of human nature, among other things, and I have seen enough of you to know that you have exceptional ability. You would need training, of course, but we can give you that, and the chance to go as far as you prove able."

We sat quiet for a moment before I spoke.

"Oh, I couldn't!" I said then. "A bank! No, I'd feel shut in—smothered, somehow. Thanks just the same, but I'll take my chance in the pictures."

"Well, I'm sorry!" says he. "But remember, my offer stands if you should ever change your mind. You have my address and you can come to—us, at any time."

The train slowed up at some tiny station high in the Sierra Mountains, and we went and got our coats and took a demi-tasse of a walk out in the clean sweet

air under a cold moon, briskly up and down for ten minutes. Arm in arm we tramped, swinging along together, our feet beating out a sort of marching tune as we went. We had done this at pretty near every station where the train had stopped, the whole ways across.

As you may of noticed, we was still on last names. Of course I was hep to the fact he must like me pretty well or he wouldn't of fed me so much. But he had never stirred a finger or an eyelash that wasn't perfectly elegantly respectful. A new experience for me, that was, because usually I have to christen them with an ax about the third visit. So I was all the more surprised when what happened, did.

We were walking, as I said, up and down the cinders by the train, along with a few scattered other passengers who had actually stayed up after nine o'clock, and Milt hadn't said a word. The whole entire U. S. A. seemed to be spread out under the moon for us, the view was that big and grand, and conversation doesn't flourish so well at such a time and place.

Up at the darkest end of the train, which happened to be right at our own car lobby, he stopped.

"This is the last time I shall see you," he says. "I am getting off at Reno on business. I got the wire at dinner time."

"Oh!" I says sharply. "I will miss you!"

And then all of a sudden he kissed me; actually took me fiercely in his arms and give me a long kiss on the mouth.

"You are the sweetest thing I have ever met!" he said. "And some day I am going to tell you more about it!"

I was absolutely surprised. Honest! I know that there is an idea about girls that they can always tell when a thing like that is coming, but that's only the rule and this was the exception. I felt like the King of England or the President or somebody equally unlikely had kissed me.

Well, to save the situation, and before I could think of any remark, for nothing came instinctive, the brakeman yelled his warning, Mr. Sherrill swung me aboard the train with a strong sweep of his arm, and we were in the lobby.

That was no good, for Anita was there with a young fellow she had made that day. And so Mr. Sherrill and I said nothing excepting only a whispered "Good-by" among the evergreen curtains, and he went off to his luxurious bed while I climbed aloft and tried to sleep.

I was so excited and upset for a long time while I couldn't. But when I did drop off at last it was Greg Strickland that I dreamed of. Ain't women the pink limit, though?

And it was not until next morning when we was rushing down through the colorful riot of California, with its wonderful orchards, the scattered gold of its poppies, and the flame of its scarlet geranium hedges, all of which Anita and me was taking in with our tongues hanging out, that I realized I hadn't given Milton Sherrill any address.

"What do you worry for?" she says. "Wire him one."

"But I don't know where to say," I protested.

"Give him the Laurelwood Hotel," says Anita. "That's the big-time place."

"A hotel like that," I says, "sounds away out of my class."

"Don't be a dumb-bell!" says Anita. "Start out big, and they will think more of you, honey! You take it from me and go to the best place. Take a suite. Put on a lot of dog, and the difference will show in the contract they give you. What do you think actorines wear big diamonds for, anyways?"

"For pleasure," says I meekly.

"For business!" says Anita firmly.

And somehow Anita's judgment won out. After all, my contract would call for not less than seventy-five dollars a week! And so next morning at the Los Angeles depot, when the boy took my bags and says "Where to?" I says "The Laurelwood Hotel," and stepped gayly into his taxicab.

CHAPTER VII

IF SAINT PETER was to take advantage of a time when God wasn't looking and start a thoroughly modern real-estate development in heaven it would look like Southern California.

Anyways, that's how Los Angeles seemed to me as I drove through it after vainly searching around the depot for Anita, and she not showing up. So I had to go without her, and pretty soon I forgot her altogether. There was a new world opening up right before my very eyes, and I was so afraid of missing a trick that my head turned around like a put-and-take top

Doubtless with all the blue laws going into effect the way they are, the housing conditions in heaven will need to be hastily increased, so maybe they wouldn't stop Saint Peter on such a job as I have described. But Los Angeles had evidently been stopped in places, for there was great gaps of empty lots scattered all through every district. But it seems nothing stops that town for very long, and it just naturally burst out again a few blocks farther on.

There was no end to the place, apparently, and we rolled on and on over eleven miles of boulevard, the driver steering with the little finger of his left hand, his foot all the ways down on the gas, and every other car on the road doing the same, but no-

body hitting each other very often. I could see at once why they made the streets so wide. It was on account of the reckless drivers, and the size of the machines. For it's a fact that practically all cars in Southern California are out-sized just like the fruit and flowers.

Well, after madly dashing past thousands of Italian villas, Greek bungalows and apartment houses disguised as colonial mansions or mission-style cottages grouped around courtyards literally overflowing with flowers and labeled El This or Del That—some Spanish stuff, I guess it was—the driver turned around and yelled along the wind, "This is Hollywood we are coming into now!"

I was glad he mentioned it because otherwise I couldn't of told where Los Angeles ended and the great movie center begun. There was the same gay big-windowed shops, with apartments over them and flower boxes blooming everywheres under bright awnings; the same rows of palmetto trees, the same phonograph shops, and gardens of petunias, fuchsia, roses, buginwillæa, and every flower in the world, I guess. There was the same extra-special brand of sunshine, and the same general ice-cream strawberry-and-vanilla-mixed effect. But not the same people.

All at once the streets held a higher per cent of well-dressed folks. White flannels burst into view in great numbers. Four times I thought I saw Wallace Reid standing on a corner, and six times a head of blond curls turned around and it wasn't Mary Pickford. But I got considerable kick out of the thought

that it might of been either or both, or would be, next time. And then before I had time to run into Charlie Chaplin or Tom Mix we drew up in front of a summer hotel of a permanent winter type, with a yard full of flowers and big cars, and a porch full of hams.

A dozen pair of white flannels crossed themselves the other way as I crossed the veranda headed for the hotel entrance, and as many rocking-chairs come to salute while assorted ladies gave me the double O. All at once I felt with a uncomfortable sharpness that while a self-made girl was all right, self-made clothes are not so good. However, remembering that my face, hair and ambition were the real thing, anyways, I took courage to march into the real genuine solid light oak office and inquire about board. A cheery, not to say sportsmanlike bird behind the desk allowed me to finish my sentence before he sprung the bad news.

"Forty-five to eighty-five dollars a week," he says, his head on one side, his manner all sympathy like a doctor that knew you couldn't last long. "American plan only. That's all your meals, room and bath."

"I'll take the cheapest edition for the present," I says, and he beckoned for a Jap boy which I had thought at first was a Japanese soldier and was sort of afraid of him, but not enough afraid as it turned out, because he was what was worse, a bellhop.

"In the pictures?" says the clerk. "Just sign here, please!" And he slipped me a pen, all politely dipped, and the register. I took it, and then I had to hesitate

because I realized I hadn't taken time coming out to think up a good picture name. And now my mind went perfectly blank on the subject and all I could think of was Alla Nazimova, but I couldn't very well put that down, so I had in desperation to write my own. But I put New York after it, instead of Stonybrook. That seemed safe, as New York is big enough so that nobody from there would be likely to tell on me. I give the clerical cutie back his pen and threw in a smile for luck.

"Pictures?" I says, "Why, yes. I expect to go to the Silvermount Super-Production Company."

"That so?" he remarked with professional interest. "We get practically all the famous people here, sooner or later! Boy! Show Miss McFadden up!"

His air had shown me up already, but I could hardly expect him to fall dead at the honor of entertaining an almost-actress. So with my feelings perfectly healthy and intact, I followed the Jap private up two flights of red-covered stairs, along a light corridor to a door which he opened and let me into a big airy room with a little balcony outside, and a palmetto tree so close I could actually touch it! And this balcony was my private one, and even more exciting to me than my first private bath.

The room itself I didn't think much of, for it was stripped right down to bare necessities. There wasn't a thing in it, from the curly-maple bureau to the iron bed, that could possibly of been spared and let the hotel management get away with the rent. Even the window curtains was the least possible, and

not a picture was on the walls. It give the room an awful bleak look, with no cheer at all, and at first I thought how mean of the management, for isn't an actor's life dreary enough without this? I didn't yet realize that in the Laurelwood Hotel it is absolutely necessary for the owner to make the rooms as near as possible actor-proof. Otherwise there would be no furniture left at the end of a season and it's cheaper to let them bring in their own to break up when the impulse overcomes them.

Well, I gave Japan two bits, and seeing my case was hopeless he let me go at that, and when he had, I shut the door after him, took off my hat and stepped out into the sunshine on my little porch and let it beat on my bare head—the sun I mean—and stood with my elbows on the railing, looking down at the friendly, smiling city.

What a place! Everybody so snappy-looking. Far more so on an average than New York, for a fact. And everybody gay and in no hurry, yet just hurry enough to seem pleasantly occupied. Jazz? The very air had jazz in it! Even the trolley-car drivers jazzed their gongs as they slid by on Hollywood Boulevard, and the autos honked to syncopation. Three phonographs was pouring the same jazz number out upon the blue air, from different rooms near by, but each with a different start, and the one nearest to me was half a chorus ahead of the other two. I may remark in passing that from that day to this I don't believe I have been out of earshot of some new record at any hour of the day or night, and I have never seen the

coat of arms of the City of Hollywood, but I am willing to bet it has got a phonograph rampant upon it.

Well, anyways, I stood there like a jazbo Juliet upon my sleeping porch, enchanted by everything I saw and heard, and wondering could it actually be me, and quite seeing now what Stricky had meant when he says there is no argument about which shall it be—California or Connecticut? A person couldn't help but make good out here. Why, just to be in such a place was inspiring. I felt like I belonged, all right! As if I had been waiting to get out here ever since I had been born, and didn't know it until now. I felt full of pep and like tearing things wide open generally. Sweet daddy! Some fairyland!

The first number on the program was of course to get action from Stricky. So after I had torn myself away from the balcony and put on a new layer of make-up with extra-heavy beading on my eyes, and using liquid face powder so as to look as professional as possible and not to be taken for an amateur any more than was absolutely necessary, I had still to make up my mind regarding the best, most casual, yet most interesting way of letting Stricky know I was here, and where.

At first I thought I would telephone him and kid him along by making him guess who it was, but then decided that would be old stuff, and besides, sort of small-town, and I dreaded to be recognized for what I was. Then I thought I would drop into his office and get some action direct, but dismissed the idea almost at once because it seemed too anxious. So in

the end I wrote a formal little note and said "Dear Strick, well I am here at last and will drop into your office sometime to-morrow morning between ten and ten-thirty."

I decided to just send it along and went downstairs to do so by messenger. At the desk I asked for Anita, but she wasn't there. Hadn't shown up at all. Well, I thought that was funny, but after all none of my affair unless she chose. So I just says "Oh, indeed?" and after seeing my letter off, went out and parked myself on the front porch, assuring myself that I had as good a right to as any there, but not really believing it. And hardly had I sat before I saw Adele.

No one who has ever seen mommer will be likely to forget her, and if only she wouldn't mug so she could of played mother parts to perfection, and only think of the salaries they command now that mothers have come into fashion on the silversheet! But Adele mugged. She even did it when not in front of the camera; at least when she imagined somebody was looking at her and saying what a sweet, motherly older woman that is over there—so aristocratic. Which they frequently did.

The very minute I set eyes upon her I thought the same. Her gray hair was dressed just beautiful—smart, but not girlish, you know. She had a proud way with her head, too, and simply sweet black clothes. Not dowdy, but typical of a refined, well-brought-up mother's things, plus the inexpensive jewels suitable for an oldish lady. She give me a little smile, or so I imagined, but I sat off by myself instead of follow-

ing it up, because I thought maybe she is Madame Estancia the famous author of *Still Weaker*, who I see in the papers was out there making her new pictures, and I was afraid she would think me fresh.

Well, you know how lonesome a gay place can be to one which isn't acquainted there, and all around me the folks was rubbing it in. Big cars would fly up to the door and dolls with basket lunches would dash out of the hotel and into the cars and yell, "Are you going to the beach?" but not to me. And handsome actors with patent-leather hair and sports clothes de luxe would bring their tennis rackets out and get some healthy exercise nursing them in a big piazza chair, and rock and talk for a while and look at me hard and go away. And still I sat like a lost sheep, beginning to feel I had been there about twenty years.

Another favorite form of outdoor sports seemed to be getting weighed on the outdoor scales which was parked on one end of the veranda, but this was a form of solitaire, for they would sneak up one at a time, slip a nickel or a penny, for both seemed to work equally good, into the slot, and step on and step off quick, as if they didn't like to be noticed. One boy even put a button in. A thin, mother-of-pearl button of a gent's underwear type, and I guess he hoped I didn't see it, but wasn't sure. He looked so worried over it that I got up and went indoors, desperately hoping that the dining room would by now be open; and mercifully it was. And even more mercifully, I got put at the same table with Adele.

Well, from the beginning of our talk, over the Ameri-

can plan, I could never of dreamed how important our knowing each other was to be. Which is generally the way big things start.

"In the pictures?" says Adele after asking me for butter as an opening.

"I hope to be," says I.

"And what was the name, dear?" says she. I told her, and Adele threw her rings into the air.

"My dear!" she says, horrified. "McFadden will never do! You will have to think up something much better. Not that I blame you, because God does not give everybody a stage name at birth. My own is Delane. Mrs. Adele Delane; and it's genuine."

I says how nice and so forth, and then Adele fired another shot.

"Did you bring your mother with you, dear?" she says.

"No," I says; "I have no mother."

"I'm so sorry, honey," says she, real gently. "A girl's best friend is her mother, especially in pictures, as I used often to say to dear Ruby Rohmer, when I was her mother."

"But aren't you that any more?" I says. "Did she die?"

"No; Ruby married a millionaire and retired," says Adele complacently. "It was largely due to me, too. That shows the value of a mother! And she naturally didn't need me any longer. A mother may be useful, dear, but what is thought of mothers-in-law is well known."

"Oh!" says I, dazed, and not yet getting it.

"Yes, indeed!" says Adele. "I know when to stop. But a girl does need looking after. When I was Helen Murrell's mother she always used to say that she never would of succeeded like she did only for me."

"The great Helen Murrell!" I gasped. "She your daughter, too?"

"Yes, indeed, until she married that banker from Pittsburgh," says Adele, plucking at her salad with all due modest pride. "I was Helen's mother; and before that I was Lila Lavelle's."

Dumb-bell that I was, I just begun to get it then.

"Oh!" says I. "You mean you only pretended to be their mother?"

"Well, a girl in this business really has to have one, you see," she says. "And I certainly have done as well by all six of mine as if they had been my own. Lila married pretty good, too. Only she fell in love, and while he's a handsome actor, he's a bad one. He give her several expensive rings, but she'd never of got that plain gold one only for him being mortally afraid of me."

"But now," I says, "who is your daughter at present?"

"Oh, I'm on a vacation," says Adele. "I just naturally got to have a rest from domesticity oncet in a while, and I still got some money left from Ruby's wedding present."

"Are you a widow?" I went on, for the old lady begun to interest me deeply, and evidently personal questions was in order.

"A widow!" exclaimed Adele. "Why, bless your

heart, honey, I've never been married! Mrs. is only my professional name, as you might say!"

"Well, it's a funny business!" I says, real interested.

"An important one!" says she quickly. "When a star gets to a certain prominence she needs a background, and a lot of personal sentimental publicity can be got out of home-and-mother stuff—you know that! Why, even the male beauties ain't above it when the publicity department runs a little short. But I never was one that contented myself with being a mere figure-head. I always looked after contracts and gave advice, and the advice of one who's been in the theatrical world all their life is neither to be pitied or scorned."

Well, I could believe that, and I had a feeling right off the bat that she was the real thing, even if she did have the most completely cuckoo way of earning a living I had ever heard of. There was something about Adele made you believe that her mothering was done partially for the sheer love of it. As though she was kind of trying to make up to herself for having been cheated out of kids of her own by cruel fate or something, and that she was really proud of those six girls, and fond of them too. Later on she showed me their pictures on her dresser, all with "To darling mommer" written over their own signatures, and she was as wistful about them as any genuine one could of been.

But in the meanwhile we got real friendly and confidential over our choice-of, and she told me who was who in the American-plan, beginning with the beautiful Madame Estancia in a far corner surrounded by young

admiring men, and ending with some of the old standbys of the place, but never mentioning who was the very classiest-looking male in the dining room, which was the young man who had paid for his weight with the button, but who sat there eating in such handsome clothes, face, hair and general manner that you would not of believed it possible, and left one only to the well-known conclusion of how stingy the rich and famous can be! He certainly was handsome, and formal, and looking over to our table a great deal.

“See that little couple over by the window?” says Adele chattily. “Them are the Gosmers—Lulu and Paul—that make the serials, you know. They live here in the hotel. Sweet girl, and has a great future! Next to them is that man draws the animated cartoons—I can’t think of his name. And beyond him the man with the monocle? That’s Lord Rexford, the famous English writer. Yeh—he’s out here with Silvermount. Writing continuity, I think.”

Well, of course, Lord Rexford was a world-famous novelist, so at first I thought Adele must be kidding. But not at all, it really was him. I had yet to learn that celebrities in Hollywood is as common as flies in August, and if a native was to meet the Prince of Wales on the street they would merely say “Hello, how’s tricks, Walesy? Working in the pictures?” and then before he could answer they would go on to tell him about the big offer they had just got from Muro, but for only fifteen hundred a week, so they couldn’t afford to take it.

Well, anyways, I swallowed Lord Rexford after the

second gulp, and then had another flock of the famous called to my attention.

"See that tall man going out the doorway?" says Adele. "That's John Austin Nickolls, the great director."

"Not the one that directs Trixie Trueman!" I says.

"Yes, dear, that's him," says Adele. "He has a great future. He's with Silvermount and maybe you will meet him. Trixie is married to Taylor Trueman, you know. He's a wonderful actor but they say he's a hop fiend. But I say one never knows, for you can hear anything in Hollywood. You should of seen Taylor playing the traps in the orchestra out to Sunset Inn last night. You must go there next Wednesday. Wednesday is movie night out there. And you must come to the dance here to-night. Put on a pretty dress, dear, and I wil introduce you to a lot of prominent people. No, no pie, thanks! I lost two pounds last week, thank goodness! Did you lose any, dear?"

"I don't know!" I says, sort of breathless.

"What!" shrieked Adele. "Don't you diet? Well, you must, dear! Watch your weight every moment, and don't put on a ounce if you can help. When I was Lila's mother I always used to tell her 'Now, Lila, just remember that slimness is the first requirement for blue-sash parts.'"

"But I don't need to lose!" I says.

"Well, you ought to diet just the same, to make sure!" says Adele. "There goes Trixie Trueman, now. She's looking for Nickolls, I guess. She runs after him like water off a duck's back. They say she's mad

about him, but I say there's more evil to them that thinks it!"

Well, I hardly heard the last of what Adele said, because of staring at Trixie Trueman, who was outside at the desk talking to the clerk. For all the hard-to-realize people, she was the hardest. To begin with she didn't have on a scrap of make-up—not a dash of it, even! Her clothes might of belonged to any school girl; good, but in no ways loud or even very snappy. Why, if I had seen her on the street I would not only of not recognized her but would have actually taken her for a lady! Quiet, refined, inconspicuous. That was her all over! And a English accent I could get even from where I was!

"She don't look a bit professional," I says.

"No, but she has class, and they have just built a handsome home out in Beverly Hills," says Adele. "She's a wild woman, though. At least they say so. But I always say 'The less said the less you have to take back.'"

We got up from the table after that and went out into the lobby where the after-luncheon crowd was hanging around. Miss Trueman had already gone away, much to my disappointment, and so had her director. But my aristocratic button man was still hanging around, and I was just about to ask Adele who was that undoubtedly great actor, when another boy who had been staring at me for the last half hour came up to us with a great air of welcome.

"How are you, Mrs. Delane!" he says. "How's tricks?"

"Oh, Mr. Rolf!" says Adele. "They are just fine, thanks. Meet Miss McFadden, Slim. Mr. Rolf is publicity director with Muro," she added for my benefit as I murmured the conventional "pleased-to-meetcher."

"Doing anything this afternoon?" Mr. Rolf inquired. "Won't you both come for a little ride? I got the old boat outside."

"Miss McFadden is just arrived out here, and she'd love to go, I'm sure!" replied Adele for me, her mother mind working automatically. "I believe I'll just go up to my room and have a quiet afternoon with my newspaper. I'm real interested in this Beverly murder, aren't you? And there's a lovely new case of a girl being missing, and that big hold-up on the Valley Road, where three was killed. So I think I'll just spend a restful hour reading. But you go along with Slim, Bonnie dear! He lives right here in the house and he's a real nice boy!"

Well, not being accustomed to mothers and their methods, I was more or less knocked cold by this, but submitted to be led away by Mr. Rolf to where his old boat—a miserable twin-six Colby-Droit of that year's vintage, with only a hundred and forty-two inch wheel-base and solid nickel disk wheels on it—was moored to the front porch. Sweet daddy! The world was certainly opening up for me!

CHAPTER VIII

“ADELE certainly is a great reader!” says Mr. Rolf as he helped me into the front seat. He took the wheel and in this chariot of fire we slid smoothly out into Hollywood Boulevard. “A very cultured woman.”

“Yes,” says I, too dumb with all that was happening to me to have any snappy small-talk. Staying in the same hotel as English titles, great directors, in the middle of a country like a stage set, and being at once invited out by a publicity man in his own super twin-six was pretty nearly more than I could endure with grace.

“She’s an old peach too!” Rolf went on. “The salt of the earth, for all her affectations. Everybody who knows Adele loves her.”

“I think she is wonderful!” I says. “And so is this heavenly town, and everybody is so kind to me. I feel as if I’d just been elected.”

“I hope it keeps that way for you, girlie!” says Rolf. “How did you happen to come out?”

I told him then, as we slid along past beautiful houses, with the dream hills looming behind them, and the sky as crystal blue and cloudless as a great bubble above all. I told him about Stricky and the contract. Only I didn’t say I had not actually got the papers yet.

"I know Stricky," he says when I was through. "Although I haven't seen him for some time—that's where Wallace Reid lives, over there—and I am glad you have come out with a contract. Work is hard to get right now. Things are pretty slow, or I wouldn't be having an afternoon off. And so many girls land in this burg with only a few dollars and not a friend in the world. It's pathetic to see them storming the offices. God knows how they exist. It fairly makes me sick, sometimes. That's Bill Hart's house up on that hill."

Well, I thought it sure was lucky about Stricky, and then forgot it, because we were traveling through such a strange and lovely open country by now, with straight endless avenues of tall eucalyptus trees marking off a broad valley like a chess-board, with oil wells for chessmen springing up all over, the whole framed in by great, rolling, treeless mountains. It seemed so funny to see the oil wells right in between the best residence districts.

"That's nothing out here!" says Mr. Rolf when I remarked it. "People have often grown to be millionaires right out of their back yard. Just pull up a couple of orange trees, and zowie! No more work for father. And the devil of it is, you can't tell where they will find it next. See that place with the tan-bark ring? That's where Will Rogers lives."

We were in Beverly Hills now, a suburb of Los Angeles, and dashing along toward the Pacific. I felt actually bewildered, but happy the way a person is in a dream. The air blowing in my face was sweet and

dry and clear, but with strong pungent scents in it of crude oil and burning eucalyptus leaves, and cedar-wood fires. That country smells like no other place on earth, I guess. And then the Pacific come into view over the cliff edge at a perfect little city—Santa Monica. I saw that ocean first over the top of a flaming hedge of red geraniums four feet tall; jade green, the water was, honest, with bursts of foam flaring on the tops of the waves like vast ruffles of white lace. The picture postcards, even the colored ones, can't give you any idea of it. Sweet daddy!

Well, you can imagine I didn't care any more for this trip than I did for my right arm! To begin with, the gayest motor ride I had ever had before was once when Bert Green took me up to Cedar Lodge back of Stonybrook, in his flivver, and we each had a glass of real beer up there on the sly. And here a snappy if rather fat young man was whirling me around through paradise in a nickel-plate gunboat the size of a whale.

Pretty soon my escort parked his boat on a sidehill sloping to the beach, among about five or six hundred others, and we got out and walked down to the beach, which was so cluttered up with enormous gayly striped canvas umbrellas that at first I couldn't really see the contents of said beach.

Of course I am used to it now, but at first I was actually ashamed to look, because them bathing girls which you see in the movies is conservative beside the ones you actually see at a California beach. And not at the time having any theories about art in the abstraction, or the classic beauty of the human form, but

only a strong New England prejudice in favor of giving the garment industry fair play, the first sight of the Santa Monica beach in full undress parade was pretty near a haymaker to me.

Apparently the fact of people going in swimming so very much in public in a personal sense meant nothing in Mr. Rolf's life, however, and his calm indifference, which was shown by the way he give a "Hello, Al," or "How's tricks, Nellie?" here and there to the bathers, proved to me that this wasn't one of them Sights of Paris like I had at first supposed, but just the usual thing. So I passed no remarks about it, and indeed I would of been embarrassed to in any case, but just stood beside him with burning cheeks and little dreaming how matter-of-course all this would seem some day when I had learned to swim and let swim.

Across the sands a short powerful-looking middle-aged man in a striped suit caught sight of us and come over to where we stood on the edge of the walk.

"Howdy, Slim!" says this bird, looking at me with considerable interest.

He had an awful hard face and a blond beard, and somehow made me at once think of one of those ancient satyrs. But he was friends with Slim Rolf, that was plain, when we was introduced.

"This is Jack Blum, the great playwright, Miss McFadden," says Rolf.

"I'd like to write plays for you, dearie!" says Mr. Blum. "I'll give you a part just before dinner to-night anyhow, if you'll make this low-life bring you around to my bungalow. I got a case of the real stuff this

morning, and I'll cast you two to try it. How about it, Slim? Drop around around six?"

"You said it!" exclaimed Mr. Rolf. "We'll be with you!"

Well, Mr. Blum had two chickens with him. A thin Leghorn of a blonde, and a cute little barred rock. At least she was dark, and what little bathing suit she had was barred. And if ever I saw girls cuckoo over a man they were it over that man. And he the homeliest ever, with his square shoulders and great trailing blond beard!

"Jackie shakes a wicked drink!" says the Leghorn. "And we'll need it after our swim. See you later, dear!"

And then the three of them dashed off for the water, and Mr. Slim Rolf and me went over to a booth, and he bought us a couple of hamburger specials, all pickles and tomatoes and hot hamburger, and we ate them right there along with a big bunch which was doing the same and I commenced to feel chatty and at ease, it was all so grand and intimate and informal and easy to break into. My heart was fairly bursting with gratitude to Stricky for getting me out there after all my wasted years at home. I was afraid I would just about fall upon his neck in his office to-morrow morning, and the thought of that contract I would be signing at not less than seventy-five a week or probably a hundred, or even very likely a hundred and fifty, didn't dampen my spirits any, either.

Then first thing I knew Mr. Blum and his poultry was dressed beyond words and jumping into a huge

yellow car that was parked a little way from ours, yelling for us to come ahead. So we did, I at the crest of the wave, so to speak, and with my only regret the fact that I had caught sight of my distinguished button actor on the beach. "But what of it?" I thought. "I will undoubtedly meet him when I get into the most exclusive circles."

Then Mr. Blum dashed off ahead, and we followed, the strangely scented wind pressing upon my face once more.

"Does everybody come down there to bathe?" I asked Mr. Rolf.

"Sure—all but the very big eggs," he says. "A lot of them have their own swimming pools at their homes, and stick around there and invite their friends."

"Oh!" says I, a little disappointed to think I would not be likely to see them on the beach, but thinking, "Well, some day I might be at such a home, who knows?"

Mr. Blum had one of the bungalows I had admired, on a street right behind the hotel. A street fairly smothered in pepper trees, which trees look like they are made out of light-green feathers and coral beads. Inside the cottage were Indian rugs and baskets, big broad sofas, a phonograph going full blast, a huge open fireplace full of eucalyptus leaves, and a big center table full of liquor, glasses, ice and siphons. All around it were people, gorgeous people. I wouldn't of believed there was so many pretty girls in the world as they was in that one room, and none of them famous, either. The men was wonderful-looking too.

It was Stricky repeated twenty times. And above all was the fierce blond viking ruling the roost, with his feet planted far apart like two solid columns, mixing endless drinks and roaring jokes at the mob.

Somebody handed me a glass, a frosted glass like a chalice on a long stem, and filled with something pink and frothy, with a sprig of mint on the top of it. A more innocent-looking portion of liquid I never set eyes on, but when I drank it down it made me blink, and only then I realized that I had taken a cocktail; because of course the only cocktails I had ever seen before was served in coffee cups up at that Cedar Inn I was telling you about. But it done me a world of good. I got chummy and talkative right away and even called the Leghorn, dear. Then the Jap servant brought another load of these around, and I would of taken an encore only Mr. Rolf grabbed me by the arm.

"Do you know those are absinth?" he says. "Come on, we'd better be going."

Well, that second drink was, certainly, as he said, absent as far as I was concerned, for I didn't get it. But it was late by then and I was willing to go back to the hotel, especially as it seemed the whole crowd was coming there for dinner and the dance. So we slipped out, Slim and I did—because we was by then Slim and Bonnie to each other—and I fairly danced up the stairs to my room and put in a careful hour's work framing myself in a black satin evening gown which I had copied off that French fellow, Callot Sœurs, who has so many extreme models in the fashion papers. I did

up my yellow curls like Pickford's, beaded my eyes real black, and went down feling like the Queen of Sheba with a mortgage on the world.

Adele was already at our table when I come in, and she was dressed in a simple little effect of gray satin and actually a cameo brooch and a taffeta bag full of a sweater she was knitting. Not that I ever from that day to this seen her knit so much as one single stitch, because it was really only a prop, but a mighty effective one.

"Did you have a nice time, honey?" says Adele as I took my place. "My, but you look wonderful! Did you make that dress yourself? Never! I don't believe it! Well, it looks like there will be a big attendance here to-night!"

And she said it. The big low-ceilinged room, bobbing with gay baskets of flowers on every table, was crowded to the limit. Some of the tables had been set together, and big parties was gathered around them, many in evening clothes. The equal of that crowd for looks most certainly don't exist any other place in the world. I fell in love with at least six hams that evening. One right after another, including my distinguished-looking foreigner, who I finally met, and whose name turned out to be Axel Something, I couldn't say what, but who danced in English even if he couldn't talk much in it.

The lobby had been cleared and a jazz orchestra was telling the world from one corner of it. And when Adele mothered me out of the dining room I come like a brave soldier, all prepared for the worst, meaning

that I would not know how to dance modern enough for this crowd. But my fears was in vain, because when Adele had caught me a partner and introduced me by saying, "Oh, you must know my daughter—that is, Miss McFadden, Ed, dear!" and I and Ed had started dancing, I discovered that camel-walking was forbidden, and so was cheek-to-cheek stuff, and that the dance was due to stop at 11.30 prompt! Say, if they ever tried to pull that stuff at any dance back home in Stonybrook, there would of been a riot! But the wild movie crowd never murmured, and I naturally got a impression of great purity from all this.

Well, anyways, it was a pretty good night at that, with the crowd shifting from hour to hour, and nearly everybody that was ever on the screen showing for a little while, and going on to some other place. After 11.30 it seemed perfectly natural to me to be sitting in the room of some perfect stranger, with a big crowd all whooping and singing, having drinks, and putting on a new number and dancing until nearly two o'clock, then the six of us going across the boulevard for a hot egg sandwich at a place called John's. And after that I crawled up to my room too excited to know I was tired, and feeling I was on the big time for fair!

But I wasn't to sleep, not yet. The lightly built walls of the hotel let in all kinds of mysterious sounds. It seemed as if the place never would grow really quiet. And then, when the piano below me had at last left off, and the drunks which had been kidding each other on the corner for half an hour at length decided to call it a night and go home, and I was just drowsing off

amidst a wild, half-pleasant, half-terrifying whirl of thought in which Jack Blum and the Leghorn, Slim Rolf and striped umbrellas, big automobiles, rushing trains and crashing jade-green breakers was all mixed up, I heard someone tapping softly at my door.

Sweet daddy, how my heart beat! I was wide awake in a second, sitting up in bed and listening with every nerve. The tap come again, and I managed to choke out a hoarse whisper.

"Who's there?" I says.

"It's me!" says a female voice. "I just wanted to be sure you was all right, dear!"

It was Adele. I hopped out of bed and opened the door for her, and she stepped softly inside, all kid curlers and flannel wrapper.

"Of course I ain't your mother, honey," she says in a whisper, "but I am interested, just the same. I wanted to know you had come in."

"Say, you are a darling to!" I says, very touched and comforted.

"Well, good night then!" says Adele. "And if you don't mind me speaking of it, don't take a drink, honey. Lay off that stuff, beginning right now. Don't touch it! This is a mighty rough town, dear, or so they say."

"I give my word of honor!" I says earnestly. "You are dead right!"

"And if you ever need me just come right to me, dear," says Adele. "I may be a mother by profession, but I like my work. It won't cost you anything and I have taken a fancy to you, honey!"

Well, we kissed on that, and I went back to bed with the one thing I needed—a warm secure feeling that I had a friend behind me—and slept like a log.

Next morning I was up long before I needed to be, and spent a long while getting dressed. The Silvermount concern was, of course, the biggest one on the Coast, and going there to sign a contract was no light matter. Also I had a double reason for wanting to look good—business, and Stricky, for I will say I was pretty well stuck on him, and I was anxious he should find me as good-looking as he remembered me, if not better. I changed my mind about what hat would I wear three times, and come back to the mirror three times for a last dash of powder. But finally I was all set and on my way.

The sun was shining again, in that bright, permanent fashion it has out there, and I felt full of it as I stepped into the boulevard, all pepped and prettied up.

While I walked down towards the Silvermount lot I began turning over in my mind whether or not I ought to sign up for as little as a hundred? You see that had been Stricky's own figure and it hadn't occurred to me back East that I had maybe ought to ask for more. But since arriving in Hollywood I had already heard so much about big salaries that I begun to wonder would the Silvermount people think less of me if I didn't show that I knew what salaries run to? Why, even the Leghorn was drawing down two hundred and fifty per, on her own confession! I decided, however, that in the end it would be better to start

modest and kind of feel things out a little before asking too big a price.

And by this time I was at the palatial front of the Silvermount Studios, which occupied two entire blocks, and was built in reproduction of our New England Early cow-barn architecture.

Parked in front of the studio under the spreading palmetto trees was hundreds of cars, and standing around in front of these was about a hundred snappily dressed people, all with make-up on. A couple of cameramen climbed into a big bus and drove off amid shoutings and cameras just as I come up, and then a man in riding breeches and a flannel shirt and no tie, but a wrist watch, came dashing out of a little side door and everybody made way for him, and then I saw Axel the Magnificent, my button hero and distinguished partner of the night before.

Well, he had on a high silk hat, and a flower in his buttonhole, and believe me, he might of been John Drew's younger brother, he was so full of dog! I naturally thought, "Well, I was always sure he was a big man and I suppose this is his own company and it's a shame to keep him standing around waiting that way," when all at once the rough-looking bird in the corduroy breeches and old flannel shirt, which I now, to my amazement, recognized through his day's growth of beard to be Nickolls, stood up on the seat of a car and called out in a big voice.

"Hey! Atmosphere for location on the Nickolls picture! Hey, you folks—hustle now! Shove 'em into the cars down there, Billy! Hurry now! What the

hell's the matter, you big Swede! Tell that Swede to come along if he's going!"

And by the Swede he meant Axel the Magnificent! I nearly died. Axel saw me, and had stopped to bow, and this was what got him his bawling out. The poor kid blushed a deep red as he was hustled off like so much cattle, but I guess he didn't dare protest. An extra! Axel was an extra! Sweet daddy!

With a very Thank-heaven-I-am-not-as-they feeling, I walked on to the main office, ashamed for Axel's mortification, and also not a little ashamed for Silvermount's biggest director. As I mounted the steps I decided I would speak to Stricky about what I had seen. I felt he really ought to know.

Inside the luxurious reception room was a couple of mourner's benches, at present unoccupied, and in one wall a window like a box office, with bars in it besides, to keep the wild hams out, and also a door leading into the Great Beyond, which had a sign, Keep Out—This Means You, in the middle. Behind the cage sat a harassed-looking young lady playing a little jazz on a typewriter to pass the time away. I pulled out a card and shoved it through.

"For who?" she says, picking it up with one hand, but continuing to jazz with the other.

"I want to see the casting director, Mr. Gregory Strickland, please!" I says.

"Huh! Lemme see—I don't think he is here any more," says she.

"But he must be. He's expecting me!" I cried.

"Well, I don't think he's here any more!" she per-

sisted. Then she give a yell at some person that I couldn't see. "Say, Mabel!" she says. "Strickland ain't here any more, is he?"

"Naw!" said Mabel's voice. "He ain't been here for the last six months."

"Know where he's workin'?" says the first young lady, still to her friend.

"I don't think he is working!" says Mabel. "He got fired from here and I think he went to New York."

"He's gone to New York," the girl in the window explained to me as though I had been deaf. "He used to be Mr. Nickoll's assistant, but he's not here now."

"But are you sure you got the right man?" I gasped. "I mean Mr. Strickland, the casting director!"

"Mr. Johnson," says the girl, giving my ignorance a rancid look, "has been our casting director for the last five years."

"Thank you!" I says, sort of weak and faint. Just then Mabel's voice broke in again.

"I think Mr. Strickland is in town," she volunteered. "I think I heard someone say they seen him, but I don't know where."

"Thanks a lot," I says again, weaker and weaker. And then, hardly knowing where I was going or why, I turned and walked back out into the street.

CHAPTER IX

THE last thing anybody likes to admit is that they are broke. And so when after my big disappointment about my imaginary Silvermount contract and Greg Strickland's equally imaginary casting-directorship, I trickled back to the hotel and told Adele, I made no mention of how little money I had left.

"Well, it's a bad run of luck, Bonnie dear!" says Adele when I had spilled my sorrows. "But cheer up, you may fall into something better. That's the beauty of pictures; you never can tell but that you will land something really big next minute. Take my advice, honey, and don't accept anything too small unless you go broke. A bit is all right, but once an extra always an extra, with very rare exceptions."

"A bit?" I says.

"Even a small bit," Adele explained. "A part where you are a maid and hand a coat, or even are a dinner guest at a table of twelve, say. That gives the producer a chance to get a good look at you."

"I see!" says I. "But what's so wrong with playing atmosphere?"

"I don't know why," says Adele. "But everything is wrong with it. Socially and every other way. A big lot of clowns gets stuck there, for one thing."

Well, I could see her point and acted accordingly.

With the result that when I paid my bill at the end of a week, during which I had got acquainted with the outside office of every casting director in the county, and had written my signature in the books of every agency, I had left the price of about ten days' board and no further. Beyond was an aching void, as one might say. And yet it was awful hard for me to realize poverty was actually so close. There was something about living in that atmosphere of hothouse success which sapped a person's good sense away. Everybody I met talked so big that honest, I felt, for no genuine reason on earth, that if I took a big attitude and demanded topside things, why I would succeed in wringing them out of life.

Also the fact of there always being something doing evenings kept up the illusion of success; immediate, past or imminent. I was generally going to the Green Mill or the Cinderella with Slim. And even sitting around somebody's suite at the hotel, putting number after number on the phonograph, or taking turns singing *Absent* to a mechanical piano with expression, would wipe out the memory of plodding from studio to studio all through the day.

Well, this Saturday afternoon that I am telling about, I come in at the especially low hour of five o'clock, the hour which the cocktail has made famous, but which I refused to recognize in that connection no matter how dog-tired I was. And as I sat on the edge of my bed and counted my kale I come sharp up against the fact that said bed would soon be taken from under me if I didn't horn in on a job before next pay day.

"Look here, B. McFadden, you poor dumb-bell," I says to myself, "this can't go on. You better move some place cheaper before the management offers to assist you in the matter. You can still get your mail here, so no address value will be lost anyways. And even forty-five bucks will go four times further where things is a quarter as dear!"

Well, I said this, but I'll admit that for once I didn't like to hear myself talk. However, it was the truth that things in pictures was awful slow just then, and actually thousands of just as pretty, far more experienced girls than me was out of work at that very minute.

Having at last come to my senses I also came to my feet, meaning to go languidly down and drawl out to the old sport at the desk that I was tired of hotel life and had decided to find a cozy little place of my own. But before I had got any further than my feet there come a knock on my door, and who of all people would it be but Anita Lauber!

I hadn't seen her since we arrived in Los Angeles, nor heard a word from her. But from the looks of her she hadn't suffered much in the meantime. She was dolled to the limit in new clothes, very snappy, even though her wrap was a Ford model, and she was close to smothered not alone with talcum powder but excitement as well.

"Say, Bonnie!" she says, rushing right into the middle of her news without even saying how are you or well here I am, or etc. "Say, Bonnie, don't tell me you got a dinner date for to-night!"

"I wish I had!" I says. "Does that remark of yours indicate that we are probably going to eat?"

"Thank goodness you ain't dated," says Anita, "because I wouldn't have you miss this chance!"

"Here!" I says. "Come in and use up a chair. Where have you been, and what chance is this that you are boiling over?"

"You are not working, are you?" says Anita, throwing herself into the overstuffed and taking out a little silver case. "No? I thought not, dear! You see I heard about your friend Strickland being out of Silvermount, and I knew the chances was that you hadn't found anything yet."

"Who told you all this?" I asked her.

"My friend, Tom Wells," says she. "The boy I met on the train—remember?"

"Yeh!" I says. "Anita, why didn't you come here to the hotel like you said you were going to?"

"I did intend to," she says, "but he asked me to lunch. He's a continuity writer, a free lance for Muro. And the minute he told me that I didn't hesitate to grab the chance of knowing him better. Then afterwards he says why don't I go to his mother's to board? So I'm there. I've been meaning to get over to see you before this, honest I have. Then to-day the big chance come up and I thought I'd let you in on it."

"Well—shoot it," I says, "before you have me a nervous wreck."

"Tom knows practically everybody in pictures," says Anita enthusiastically. "And he's been promising all along that he would get me in. Well, he was at Tom

Muro's office this morning about a script, and Muro says he's giving a party at his house out at the beach to-night and why not come to dinner and bring a couple of girls? And I like you, dearie, so I thought of you first off."

Well, that was quite some slice of news.

"Say listen!" I says. "Do you mean to tell me that the great T. H. Muro himself is asking two wrens he has never seen out to his house to dinner? Sweet daddy!"

"Why, they often do!" says Anita. "That's the way they get hold of a lot of new faces, and many a fat contract has come out of no more than that."

"But say, listen, Anita," I says. "Muro is a big man, and neither I nor you are fools. When a man of his class gives a party where he invites unknown chickens, either he seriously does it to look 'em over, which he could do better in his office, or else it is going to be a stormy evening at the beach to-night, in which case I believe I will stay as much at home as a person can in a hotel."

"Well, Bonnie McFadden, of course if you want to insinuate that I would go on any rough party I can't help your evil mind," says Anita, getting to her feet. "You don't understand how things are done in pictures. And if you are going to throw down the chance of actually meeting Tom Muro in his own house, all I can say about it is that you got a perfect right to be a poor but honest fool! So long!"

"Here, hold on, Anita!" I says. "Don't go so fast. Of course it would be wonderful to meet Muro, and

it's the chance of a lifetime, for don't I know how hard it is to get a bowing acquaintance with even his office boy! And maybe I do him an injustice. After all, he is a topside person, and very likely a good one."

"Now you're using sense!" says Anita, still fingering her little silver box nervously. "Put on your snappiest evening dress and be all set by seven. Tommy and me will drop around for you. So long, and here's hoping we both get a job out of it!"

"Sweet daddy, wouldn't that be luck!" I says, kissing her good-by. "Thank you, Anita, dear!"

When Anita was gone I thought, "Well, what a mean crack it is to believe the worst of a person just because they are a powerful producer and you happen to be a good-looking girl." To which I also added the fact that if any one back home had said to me "A good friend of mine over to West Haven is giving a bust and I can bring anybody I want to," why I would not of thought it strange or even hesitated for one minute. Besides all of which I had just forty-five dollars cash money and absolutely no prospects, and why be so unjust to Mr. Muro when I didn't even know him yet? And a lot more self-kidding like that for half an hour or more, until I had actually got myself to a point where I pretty nearly believed T. H. Muro was a kind, fatherly old boy who asked poor friendless young motion-picture aspirins out to the house so he and his wife could pick out the ones which looked like they had the most talent.

CHAPTER X

I say I almost had myself bluffed to that point of view, but not quite. Deep down in an unquenchable corner of my heart a persistent voice kept telling me that I was taking a chance and that I knew it. But I kept that voice within bounds by arguing that this was a modern day and age and nobody could afford to be too big a prune. But I didn't go down and tell Adele about my invitation as I ordinarily would of, and dressed alone.

By the time I was dolled, my excitement and enthusiasm had grown up to a pretty high pitch. And when Anita and her friend was announced, and I come down through the lobby to meet them, I wanted to shout that I was dining at the great Mr. Muro's and wondered if maybe the fact didn't just naturally show on me, anyways. I would not of been the least surprised to see somebody point at me and say in a loud whisper, "There goes one of Tom Muro's next stars; she's dining with him to-night. She has a big future, that girl has!"

Well, Anita's sweetie had a red tie to match his hair, and also several drinks before meeting us. Going out in his car—which they all seemed to have one even if it was only a B. C. model of some sort—well, anyways, going out he told us all about what was

wrong with pictures and what vices who had, and the real inside facts about the crooked way this person got their contract, and anything else you choose. Believe me, that boy could peddle the why!

But I was hardly listening to him, because it always made me kind of dreamy driving out to the beach at nightfall with the lights in the houses climbing the hills like lost fireflies, and that eternal perfume of oil and burning cedar sort of intoxicating me. And if it hadn't been for Stricky going back on me the way he done, I would of been quite happy.

It's a funny thing, but whenever I was out with two sweeties, such as Tommy and Anita, I always got to dreaming of how I loved Stricky and encouraging a lot of lonesomeness in myself the way the third party is apt to in such a case. Sweet daddy! It is no easy thing for a girl to sit in the tonneau of a big bus all alone on a moonlight night and watch the silhouettes of two good friends of either sex on the front seat, even if one of them is driving. Only a person of great strength of character like myself can resist taking on something temporary when they are constantly exposed to that sort of stuff.

Well, anyways Anita and this goof were particularly bad specimens and my only comfort lay in the thought that well anyways my hair would not be all mussed up when we got to the party.

It was kind of a shock to me, though, when we swung down off Ocean Boulevard in Santa Monica, and stopped in front of a frame cottage that would not of been really conspicuous back home at Stony-

brook Beach. At first I thought there must be some mistake and that we had not go there yet.

"Is this Muro's house?" I says, trying not to be too disappointed, because I had naturally expected it to be a palace.

"Sure it's his house!" says Tommy, helping me out. "But not the one he lives in. He just has this one for bathing and other parties."

Well, Muro's stock went up with me again, because a three-story house is a big one to keep just as an extra, so to speak, and once inside I got even more impressed. There was two Jap butlers in sort of bumblebee costumes in the lower hallway, and a blast from errant saxophones was shaking it up in the big shadowy room beyond. Not to mention the elegant big bedroom upstairs into which Anita and I was shown, there to lay our humble wraps down among a flock of evening capes which looked like a bargain sale at a brocade factory.

"Some bungalow!" Anita whispered to me. "Kid, this is class; we are in on the real thing!"

"I'll say we are!" I says, taking in the painted furniture, thick carpets and crowding females around the long dressing mirrors. "I guess we must of been mistaken about being asked to dinner. Where on earth could they feed this crowd unless at a buffet?"

"Oh, it's dinner, all right!" says Anita, finding parking space for a little more rouge on her lips. "Nothing small-time about Mr. Muro."

"You said it!" says one of the girls at the mirror, in a silver-spangled dress which commenced way be-

low the chin and forgot to go on below the knees. "You said it! Tom certainly can peddle a party!"

Over to one side was a couple of girls which I recognized them at Kit Knute Divers, Betty Anders and another whose name I didn't know, but I had often seen both of them in comedies and bathing suits, and now easily recognized them because of their being practically dressed the same to-night. Also they was talking together and this is what they says.

"Are you taking up golf, too, deah?" says Betty, and the other come back with "Oh, my deah, I've been at it for an age!" Then Betty says, "I do hope you won't think it odd, my coming here to-night with Harry. His wife is ill, poor deah, and he simply insisted! I'm uneasy about our being seen together, though. You know how fearfully easily people talk!"

Well, I guess that super-Boston accent, coming from the well-known divers, was even more of a jolt than the inside of Muro's house had been. Then Anita was all set and we drifted along downstairs.

During that first half hour of the evening I was impressed by the air of refinement and the English pronunciation on every hand. I felt like a mut, and common as dirt. There was forty people at the party, and nobody introduced anybody around. I didn't even know which was Mr. Muro. Almost all of the girls was in evening dress but none of the men, but yet it was a brilliant scene, and everybody spoke whether they knew each other or not.

After the bumblebee Jap butlers had buzzed around with a flock of cocktails, but buzzed around me in

vain, somebody threw open a double door like in a drama, and there was a huge round table, and if you have never seen a table set for forty people you can guess my sensations, otherwise not. Especially when I add that not alone was this table glistening with glass and silver and the center of it heaped with scarlet eucalyptus blossoms and white oleanders, but at each and every place set a whole quart of champagne. I felt an awful funny mixture of thrill, scare and pleasure as a little short fellow which had been telling me how good he was seized me by the arm and we went in to that dining room, somewheres about the middle of a long procession which was dancing to their meal, the jazz band leading the way.

And that band never stopped the whole time we ate, because in Hollywood it is a fixed custom that you get either incessant phonograph or incessant jazz band with every social gathering, and a mighty lucky thing, too, because otherwise the folks might have to talk.

Well, the little feller which had brought me in had kind of run short on how good he was, and so commenced to vary the talk with how good I was. According to him I was some wren and too good to work for my living. Also I soon found out his politics. He was a Shin-Finder.

Well, of course, I wasn't going to stand for any rough stuff like that and so I crossed mine the other way on the far side of my chair and talked to the partner on the other hand of me, who happened to be Anita's Tommy, and would you believe it, he started

a hot line at once, and there was Anita only three places away! I tried to stall him off by asking who was everybody, and it seems several of the big comedy producers was there. As for the girls, they was mostly D-minus leads—or just girls.

Well, I don't like to say much bout any party to which I have been a invited guest, but there are occasions when this doesn't go, and Mr. Muro's party was one of them.

Did you ever see an Early Roman fillum called Quo Vadis? I don't mean one of these new importations; I mean a very old one made in Italy about 30 A.D.? Well, it is a marvelous picture, for a costume piece, and there is some pretty rough parties in it, but it got by the censors, and this party I am telling you about would not have. And yet there was some footage that evening at Muro's which to this day stands out in my mind like stills.

When dinner was half over, of the most beautiful food I had ever seen in my life, the front door burst open and in come Atlas Smith; you know, the famous strong man. And he was followed by a stormy crowd of friends which had all of them invited theirselves to this party of ours, and had already got thoroughly wet before arriving. Well, the first still I am telling about is of Atlas, he having broken up the party from the table and by then nobody cared if they ate any more or not. Well, Atlas, he started something with Anita, and she pretended she didn't care for it and lay down on the floor and commenced to holler. So this big giant lifted her up on the palms of his hands

and bumped her against the ceiling until she yelled uncle. He did it with no more effort than if she had been a paper doll, although he was very drunk, with no collar on, and the muscles in his neck never even strained. That is one of the stills I will never forget.

Another is of Betty, the girl which had been so refined upstairs, her pretty accent all wilted, her face misty with drink, and talking natural while holding out her overflowing wineglass to me and bawling me out because I was sober.

"Drink wish me, dearie," she yelled. "Shay—you're too dam' refined for thish party!" Which was checked off to humor by the rest of the crowd.

Well, when we left the table I was in a sort of daze, not knowing quite what to do. My brain actually couldn't take it all in. It was like a mask had fallen off everybody there, leaving something fluid exposed. I'm not trying to be funny by meaning the liquor. I mean that when these folks forgot their false fronts, which it's the truth we all present one to the world, there didn't seem to be nothing left to them but mush. They pawed anybody near. They said things—sweet daddy! The room swam in a blue haze of cigarette smoke and sound waves from the saxophones, and for a moment it seemed to me that the men and women's face floated in that curious sea, half detached from their bodies like the bloated faces of drowned people. It was a nasty thought, but honest, that is the way it looked. I felt sick, and crawled off behind a thick curtain in a bay window, but even that curtain seemed heavy with strong perfume and

tobacco smoke, and the damask felt slimy under my hand as I clung to it, trying to think. And then a pale face like a moon come around the corner after me. It was the little man which had danced me in to dinner, and his face was pasty white.

"I like you!" he says in a thick voice. "How would you like to go to work to-morrow? I will sign a contract."

Then his wet paw reached out and lit on my bare shoulder.

That was enough. Ordinarily I am no athlete, but when a thing has got to be done, it can. I give that clown one shove which sent him unexpectedly half across the window into a big chair, where he sat stupidly staring like a big Japanese doll which I had thrown there. He didn't seem real. But I cut out, for all of that. Somehow I stumbled and fought my way across the floor, which was now crowded with dancers, and up the dim stairway, disturbing a couple who were mushing it up. Frantically I dug my coat out of the pile and then down the stairs again, the laughter and screams and jazz beating in my face like a evil wind. At the front door a woman caught me and called something aloud. It was Anita.

"You little fool!" she screamed angrily. "That was Tommy Muro himself!"

"Well, I don't give a damn!" I shouted back. And then I tore myself away from her and slammed out into the cool dark street.

How long I ran and ran I hardly know. I wasn't wearing any speedometer, so I can't be sure, but I'll

say it seemed like a hundred miles. The part of the beach that I was at is all built up into narrow streets, mere alleys, a lot of them, and at night they are dark like the Middle Ages. They twist and turn a lot too. I would dart up one of them as far as it ran straight, and then along the next one, and the next. Dim lights twinkled here and there, and a strong salt wind brought in the roar of the Pacific. Pretty soon the narrow, stifling houses was behind me, and the big, clean stretch of ocean was there on my left, under a white moon. Ahead the lights of Venice, which is the Coney Island of the Coast, winked and twinkled.

I was running along an immense boardwalk by then, my high heels catching in the cracks, but not enough to stop me. Where I was going I didn't know, except that it was away. And then all of a sudden I couldn't run any further. I was dog-tired, and seeing a bench under a electric lamp I flopped on it and buried my face in my hands and cried.

"That can't be the way you got to do it, Bonnie!" I says. "Don't tell me different. I know in my heart. If a person has the goods to deliver, some one will buy them at a fair price, surely! I don't believe things like that has to be done! I won't believe it. I'll get in the pictures yet, and get in straight, so help me!"

Well, when I had said all that to myself I quit crying and felt better, and commenced to wonder how was I to get home, for the thought just come to me that I didn't have a nickel with me even if the cars was still running, nor have any idea how or where was a taxi stand or a telephone. It was a distinctly

poor situation all the ways around and I felt pretty weak and miserable and helpless. Not even a cop was anywheres in sight, and the only thing that moved was a passing auto with a mushing couple in it.

Then along the boardwalk come a solitary figure—a young man walking briskly, whistling and swinging a cane. I kind of shrank up close against the lamp by instinct, hoping he wouldn't take any notice of me. My head was down and at first he started to pass by. Then he slowed up and come back, kneeling with one knee on the other end of the bench and giving me a light poke with his cane.

“Good evening, kid!” he says, and I looked up.

It was Stricky!

CHAPTER XI

FOR a moment he stared at me without actually knowing it was I, the way a person does who is far from expecting to see you. Then it began to dawn on him and he took off his hat.

"For the love of Mike!" he says. "Why, it's Bonnie!"

"Yes!" I says, getting to my feet and commencing to shake all over like the last straw or something. "Yes, it's me. And what are you going to do about it?"

"Why—whatever you like!" says he. "When did you get here and why didn't you let me know you were coming? And of all things, why are you sitting alone out here in those clothes at this hour?"

"I did let you know!" I says. "To Silvermount offices! And as for being here, I have just run away from a party I didn't like!"

And then trembling got the better of me and like a darn fool I sunk down on the bench and begun to cry for all I was worth.

In an instant Stricky was beside me, putting a arm around me and pulling me to him with a lot of there-now-old-lady and get-hold-of-yourself-little-girl and other such comforting remarks. And for a moment just any old friendly shoulder felt so good to cry on that I didn't have the courage to move away from

it, nor want to either. After a minute or two I sat up and dried my eyes and was thankful I had a compact powder in my coat pocket, and a little self-control back again.

"Here now! That's better!" says Stricky. "Say listen! You haven't a car anywheres around? Well, we'll walk up to Sunset and get one. And we can talk things over."

I nodded, and we started for the top of the cliff.

"Well, I suppose you wrote to the Silvermount offices?" says Stricky. "That's why I didn't get the letter. You see I got out a little while ago. We couldn't agree on my new contract, and I simply refused to stay along on the old basis, so I got out. And they have been beastly careless about forwarding my mail."

"Oh!" I says faintly. "I came out here on your word, you see! Where are you now?"

"Well, nowhere," says he. "But I have a big offer that I'm considering. I haven't signed yet, but I expect that I will in a day or two. Now tell me about yourself!"

"There isn't anything interesting," I says. "I'm not working yet. But there is nothing original about that in this town."

"Gee, that's a shame!" says Stricky with vigorous annoyance. "When I sign up with Muro perhaps I can do something for you."

"Muro!" I says, drawing away from the arm he had through mine. "Muro! Oh! Not there!"

"Say listen! They are fine people!" says Stricky.

"Tom's a great little feller. I'll introduce you to Tom, and if you make a hit you can get anything you want on the lot."

To me all this was like a sudden iceberg after a friendly stove if you can see what I mean. I wanted to think I had been wrong about Stricky and it seemed like he wouldn't let me.

I says no again, getting more faint and remote by the minute, and by this time we had come to Sunset Inn, which is called that way because it don't start until sunset and then tries to double for the sun all night. It blazed with orange lights, and as we stopped in front the orchestra broke out into a fresh effort. From the row that it made I could easily imagine some well-known star was playing the traps as per usual. I don't believe I ever really hated jazz except at that moment. Jazz has no business butting in on a person's private troubles.

"Care to go in for a while?" says Stricky, jerking his head towards the door. But I shook mine.

"I'd rather go home, please," I says. "The Laurel-wood."

Stricky called a taxi, and under the strong light I seen that he was just as swank as ever. Even the way he stood had snap, and I couldn't help but feel a kind of softness towards him, for it's the truth that it takes an awful lot of proving to make any woman believe a man with smooth hair and a perfect tie is really a villain, especially when he is trying hard to flag her.

When he helped me into the darkness of the taxi

and got in beside me, settling down for the long drive home, I softened even more, and little by little he got out of me something of what had happened that evening, only of course I mentioned no names. A well-known producer was all I says. And while I told him, the light charm of this bird was actually so strong that he had me forgetting how he had lied to me! Then he started talking.

"Say listen!" he says, coolly lighting a cigarette as if I had merely described Merry Christmas or something. "A contract is a rare animal around here this season—I'll say it is! Why don't you take him up?"

"Stricky!" I says. "No! Not that from you!"

"But why not?" he persisted. "You want to be a great actress. Well then, you got to live, to get all kinds of experience or you'll never be worth a damn. Take things as they come, and don't get in love or marry. That's my motto!"

Now, I got a sort of hangover, I guess, from the older generation. I couldn't see how a person would be able to talk like that and actually mean it. There was a horrible casualness about the tone in which he spoke. If Stricky had been frankly vicious I wouldn't of minded half so much, because active viciousness is a definite thing that a person can fight. It was his taking the supreme important thing in life—love—in the same tone as breakfast food, made me feel so bad. And it was the third time in one night I had heard that attitude expressed. Could it really be true that I was the only one who thought decency worth having?

The idea come pretty near being intolerable. And when Stricky, after saying what he had, went further and apparently considered it would be a matter of course to kiss me good night, I couldn't even speak to him in protest. All I could do was to shove him away and stumble blindly into the hotel.

If I had been one of these trained carrier pigeons and Adele's room the dovecot, or whatever they call it, I couldn't of gone there any straighter or swifter than I did.

Adele was in bed of course and also in full night armor from chin strap to corn plasters, and to some she might of looked funny, but to me she was beautiful, for her arms went straight out to me and her eyes shone with kindness from the middle of the cold cream and everything the instant she caught sight of my face.

"Oh, Adele—you tell me it don't need to be true! that I got to come across to get into the pictures!" I wailed, throwing myself at her with more force than compunction. "Say I don't need to stand for it. Say I can make good by making good!"

"Honey!" she cried, folding her blessed arms around me and understanding everything in a flash. "Of course you can! There, there! Cry all you want, dear. I understand, and I'd like to beat up the bunch of crooks that you been out with, whoever they are!"

"Oh, Adele, Adele!" was all I could say.

"There now, I guess I'm wise!" says she. "I suppose you are dead broke, dear, and that you went on a job-party in despair and then found you was too

decent to go through with it? I thought so. Well, it won't lose you anything in the end, honey. Character is as much value to an actress as to anybody."

"But what'll I do?" I says, partially recovering. "I'm stony. I can't get a opening. It seems like it's absolutely hopeless."

"Well, tell me one thing, dear," says Adele. "Are you absolutely convinced you can act? Or do you just want a lot of easy money?"

"Everybody on earth wants a lot of easy money," I says, "but only a fool expects to get it. No, Adele, I want to act; I want to make good!"

"And what makes you think you can?" she says, but very kindly.

"What makes a person believe religion?" I asked her back. "You just know it's true that there is a God and nothing can shake you. That's how I feel about being able to act and to make good. It's the same as my religion."

To my surprise Adele reached over and kissed me.

"There!" she says. "I knew it! They say the broad and easy path is the one to travel in the movies, but *I* always say there's too much traffic on it. Better take the narrow one, dear, and I'll go with you."

"How?" says I, vaguely pleased, but not understanding.

"I'll tell you something," says she. "When I first saw you I hoped you was a prospect. And I needed one badly, for, honey, I'm about broke too!"

"You mean you thought I might hire you for my mother?" I gasped.

"Just that!" says Adele. "And when I found out you was green and had no money, why I naturally put the idea out of my head. But meanwhile I've got to be real fond of you, and I'm going to help you all I can! And the first thing we are going to do is move out of this hotel into cheap but decent rooms with privilege to use the kitchen range and washtubs."

"I'm for it!" says I.

"And you will take any extra stuff you can get," she says.

"Fine!" says I.

"Furthermore, you need to change your last name," says she. "And you can just simply take on mine. Bonnie Delane. How does it listen?"

"It listens well," says I. "But not half as good as living together with you does. I need you bad, Adele."

"Well, my first official act will be to send you straight off to bed," says she. "And by the way, dear, you better cut the Adele from now on. Call me mommer!"

"Oh, mommer, you just bet I will, Adele!" says I.

CHAPTER XII

IN the house on Vine Street to where mommer and I moved, there was beds that flew up into the wall if you didn't hold 'em down to the floor by main force. Also we had an elegant bright green ingrowing rug on our sitting-room floor, woodwork with a mahogany-almost finish on it, and a landlady that trusted us like we was burglars.

That was partly my fault, because when we first looked at the place, I should of let mommer do all the talking, instead of which I went and horned in. For when we had seen that the rooms was as right as we could expect for the money, Mrs. Snifter, the landlady of the flat, come around to references with all the delicacy of a pickax.

"Are you in pictures or are you working?" she says suspiciously.

"In pictures," I says with great pride, thinking that would settle everything. And it did, pretty nearly, only not the way I had intended. For I seen at once by Mrs. Snifter's face that it had not been a reference but a confession.

"Well, I don't know about letting these rooms go," she says. "I had about promised them to a young man who has a job with a business house."

"We will pay the usual two weeks in advance if you wish," says mommer, giving that woman the

scornful eyebrow in a manner I certainly did admire. The landlady right away softened up a little and remarked well, she'd really rather have a couple of nice ladies and we could stay if we liked, so mommer wrote out a check for the advance, Mrs. Snifter took it and reluctantly left us alone in our new quarters, and then mommer turned on me.

"Don't you know any better than to admit you are in pictures to a native landlady?" she demanded. "My heavens, I thought we was going to lose the place! Always leave them think at first that you are a Eastern tourist or a Iowa farmer's family looking for a permanent home, and you'll get treated right. There! Don't take off your hat, child. I want you to take this cash and run down to the bank with it before she puts that check through."

"But for the love of Pete!" I says. "If you had the cash with you why didn't you give it to her?"

"I like to keep my bank balance up as high as possible," says mommer seriously. "And I only had the cash in case she refused to take the check."

Well, I went down to the bank like she asked, putting in my half of the expense, too, and feeling more hopeful of the future than I had at any time since I arrived in the West. That I was actually more nearly broke than ever before in my life did not seem to matter at all, and that I was furthermore about to demean myself by looking for atmosphere work now appeared to me in the light of the right thing to do. I wouldn't let it queer me. I'd be so darn good that it would be impossible to overlook me, and some day

the director would beckon and say, "Come here, little girl, you with the blond curls I want to speak to you," and that would be the beginning of my triumph.

Dreaming daydreams like that, Hollywood again become a city of enchantment, and it's a true fact that on one day in Hollywood you say of it, "I must get out of this infernal place before it swamps all my decent instincts," and then the next day something nice happens to you and you say "Dear, gay Hollywood, how pretty, what fun we get here, I am going to make a million dollars and never move away!"

This being one of the hurrah days, I was ready to fall on the neck of the first person I met and would of, only it happened to be Axel, and he was too tall for it. But I was real cordial.

"Hello!" says he. "Ay see by tha doorbell you bane living also in da same house!"

"Is that so?" says I. "How did you get by the Delane?"

"Ay youst talk with your mother," he says solemnly. And you certainly got to hand it to these foreigners for having good manners. Think of the kidding I would of got from any American on a thing like that! But from Axel's line you would of thought she had been my mother the whole time.

"Say, Axel," I says, calling him that way partially because instantaneous first names is a custom of the country and partially because I couldn't pronounce his last one—"say, Axel," I says, "you've been working for Silvermount, haven't you?"

He nodded, a slight blush showing that he appre-

ciated my tact in not saying "doing atmosphere," the same as I had appreciated his delicacy about mommer.

"Yes," he says. "Aye must get some experience."

"I wonder would you help me get in there?" I went on with my best smile—the one which has since brought me in something over two million dollars. It worked, even then.

"Aye be glad to try," he says.

And that was a lot for anybody to promise, because every one for themself and never bring along a friend that may take attention off you, is the motto of the first-line trenches in the picture war.

"You see I feel like you do," says I; "that the experience will be valuable. Know the business from the bottom up. That's my theory."

After which I explained laughingly that mommer and I had got simply bored to death with hotel life. We just positively could not even endure to enter a restaurant any more, and that as a matter of fact we were going to have a little snack at home this very evening, and would love to have him join us.

Axel agreed that there was nothing like a little place of your own. As for home cooking, he adored it and would be tickled to eat with us. So he went along with me to the delicatessen stall at the nearest market, while I bought some cold ham and crackers and a dish of crabflake salad with Pons Asinorum in green peppers on the top of it, and a bottle of milk and some fresh figs. And then we went back to the flat, there to enjoy a typical Southern California home supper, in a very friendly, chatty way. And as mom-

mer said when Axel went off to his own room after helping with the dishes, it certainly is a pleasure to meet somebody who talks your own language even if they can't do it in English.

The very next day Axel piloted me to the Silvermount. Not to the exclusive—and exclusive is right—front door, up to which I had pranced so confidently before, but to the side entrance, where I had seen him coming out with the crowd for the Nickolls' location. Axel went to a window halfway down a sort of tunnel, which led out onto the big lot itself, and spoke to a harassed-looking man inside.

"Not to-day, not to-day!" says the man impatiently. "Nothing doing! Hold on, though. Renway is going to do a big afternoon-reception sequence over on stage four to-morrow morning. He is calling for a snappy crowd. Bring her around for that if you like, and remember—on the set, made up and ready at nine sharp!"

My heart was jazzing while I listened.

"There!" beamed Axel, coming back to me in triumph. "Ain't we got fun? Youst svell afternoon clothes and aye make up your face for you!"

Sweet daddy! What a pipe it seemed. Ten dollars a day for nothing! How it did pay to make friends. I had got Axel a meal, which he had plainly needed, and there he had at once gone and got me a job! I could of hugged the great good-looking boob, and together we just regularly danced home to tell the news to mommer.

It was she made me up next morning, and not Axel,

after all. When she had me finished, all the way from grease to yellow powder, and shown me how to soak my powder puff with cold cream and saturate the powder onto that, I felt real professional. I hadn't given away that up to that very minute I supposed stage make-up and screen make-up was the same, and would never have dreamed of putting red inside my nostrils unless she had told me to. Well, when she had done this she turned me around in my embroidered suit and my small hat, a sort of worried pucker gathering between her eyes.

"I hope it will get by," she says. "There, honey, your face is O. K. anyways!"

And then she sent off Axel and me and started washing up the dishes before we was fairly out of the place like the genuinest mother that ever was. Half an hour later I was back, alone, and crying on her shoulder.

"Oh, honey!" says Adele, "was it your clothes? I was afraid so! I hate to tell you, honey, but I wouldn't be your mommer if I didn't. Your street clothes is something fierce! I thought it was a mob, but if I had known it was a drawing-room I wouldn't of even let you try. Now your black evening dress is fine! A evening reception would of been O. K. or a ball-room."

"He's a beast, that director!" I gasped. "No manners! Why, we was all set. He had called for lights, even, when he saw me and says to his assistant—not even to me direct, mommer—he says to his assistant to take that little hick out of the set and send her

home—this was a swell affair and what the hell did they mean by letting in people who didn't have a proper wardrobe?"

"I know, honey!" says she. "But don't you fuss any more. It can't be helped, although it's a disappointment. In the old days they used to furnish a wardrobe, but now they don't for anything except costume pieces."

"But I have no money to get a new suit or hat!" I says. "My black evening dress will be a big help if nobody gives a ball for the next couple of weeks!"

And sweet daddy, didn't I say a mouthful in that remark, though! Not only did nobody put on a ball-room within my hearing, but not even a good big street crowd that couldn't apparently be picked up free right downtown in Los Angeles somewheres.

And then one solid month later Axel burst in with the glorious news that the Artlife studio was going to do a giant costume production with mob scenes in it. He had been notified to come to work.

"And this time I ban going ta get you by, betchew may life!" he says.

The next morning we was outside of the Artlife gates early. But prompt as we was, three or four had beaten us to it. As is the regular way with a mob scene, the assistant directors had notified their preferences, and put an ad in the papers as well. And when an ad for extras appears in a Los Angeles newspaper the result is much the same as if they was to advertise free beer.

Owing to Axel's advance information, however, this howling mob accumulated behind instead of ahead of us, and when at last the door opened, and we began to pour in past the assistant casting director, why Axel simply says as we come abreast of this bird "Hello, Bill, Aye brought may lady friend," and Bill give one swift but sure look at me and hands me a slip for my name and says the women's wardrobe is upstairs to the right, and then he added the sweetest words tongue or pen can say.

"You are hired," he says.

And like the lady who was sure of her husband's love, I knew it before he spoke, but oh, sweet daddy, how I did like to hear him say the words!

Well, the costume that they gave me made me look fully two hundred years older. What I mean to say is that it was with a hoop skirt and so forth and a quilted petticoat and it was the first time in my life I ever wore one. Also a little hat about as big as a restaurant pancake, of straw and ribbons and flowers, and it tied with long streamers under the back of my curls. It seems I was a French Revolutionist or something and the script was a melo called *The Queen's Necklace*, By Alexander du Mas Pear. Well, I blessed this Pear, whoever he was, for writing a scenario that required crowds, especially when the girl who dressed next to me at the long locker table says that the dope was we would probably work for a week.

"Well, I only hope the company will last that long, that's all," says this jane who told me. "I hear Benny Silvermount is on the rocks."

"What's that to us over here at Artlife?" says I, patting on cream.

"Silvermount owns us," says she. "Every producing company out here owns the next one. That's why it's so easy to get blacklisted. There ain't really much beside Muro, The Divers and two or three little ones, that Silvermount don't own. Muro is the only real competitor they have."

"It would be fierce to get in wrong then," says I. "They hand a grudge on down the line, I suppose?"

"You said it!" she replied. "There goes the bell—come along. We should worry, if we get our checks! For my part, it won't hurt my feelings any if they work us overtime!"

Well, this set we went on was a beauty. As far as I could make out it was the front of Paris in 1770 or thereabouts and it certainly looked exactly like it. At least I couldn't of told it from the real thing. Altogether the set covered four acres, and was composed of streets and alleys and squares, bridges, churches and a guillotine which I at first thought was a sort of cross bar for taking exercise on until they told me that the only thing supposed to get any exercise on it was a person's neck.

Of course only the tenderloin side of the buildings was built, and you know how they are without my describing them; nothing more back of them than most oil stock. But what showed to the naked eye of the camera was actually built, not just painted, and there was real cobblestones on the streets with stage grass growing between because it photographed better. And

the part I was cast for was to loaf around these streets with a couple of other girls, trying to vamp a bunch of soldiers, among which was Axel. I suppose this was in order to make it seem like a natural street scene.

Well, really it was a beautiful sight with several hundred costumed extras floating around and even before Major McGee, who was directing Taylor Truman, Trixie's husband, in the piece, come out and called things to order, the set give a fine illusion of reality. Not even Axel showing a girl dressed like a antique newsboy how to dance the camelwalk could destroy it. And that first day of my work for the pictures was one of the most beautiful and happy of my life.

At five o'clock one of the assistant directors yelled the welcome "Everybody now on this set come back at nine o'clock to-morrow! Nine o'clock to-morrow. Please have your make-up on; everybody now on this set." And so forth several times over to be sure everybody had heard it, but he need not of worried, for they all heard the first time.

When I was dressed again Axel was waiting for me at the foot of the stairs leading down from the big barn of a women's dressing room.

"Come on, let's cash in," he says. "Aye want Aye should buy you a dinner to-night at Frank's or some place."

"Oh, fine!" says I. "Gee, but I am sick of eating at home!"

Well, we laughed at that, but pretty soon it was wiped from our faces by bucking a little group of

angry hams that had been on the set with us, but which was now standing around muttering to each other.

"What's tha matter?" Axel says as we come up.

"Matter, hell!" says one. "They aren't giving any checks to-night. Bill says they will work us until Saturday night and pay off then. But damn it, will they?"

"I've got a good mind not to pay any attention to the call for to-morrow," says another. And then I butted in.

"Why surely they wouldn't spend half a million dollars on a set like that and then not pay us!" I says.

"Huh! Wouldn't they, just!" says the girl I have mentioned before.

"How do they think we live in Los Angeles?" says another. "On credit? Huh!"

"Well, never mind, it means a week's work," says I.

"Oh, I don't mean they won't pay," says my dressing partner, "but they may hold us up. If they are short of cash they will take it out of our hides. They know we don't dare to holler. There are too many more looking for our place."

"You been doing this long?" I says.

"Ten years!" she says bitterly, and walked away.

"Come along home," says Axel in a low voice. "Aye don't like that woman. Did you see how she kept tryin' to squeeze may out of the camera all afternoon? Every time we come in front of tha camera in tha marching scene, she turn her head, so that Aye betchew

may life, may face is entirely hidden by her hat and she gets a full close-up flash!"

"Oh, no, Axel!" I says. "How mean!"

"Youst wait until you see da picture," says Axel gloomily. "And dan you see!"

The next two days were still like heaven to me, even though Major McGee commenced to work us nights as well, and we would not get off the lot until midnight or later. The major was one of these temperamental directors that work by fits and starts, and everybody including himself, I guess, had to suffer for it. Besides which he was under the extra difficulty of his star being wet almost always. We would often wait for a hour or two at a time, hanging around doing nothing, while they was trying to get Trueman sober enough to go on working, or wet enough to be willing to work, according to whichever the case might be.

Well, anyways, hanging around on a set or a location by the hour was no hardship to many of us, provided we eventually got paid for it. But I was intent on drawing down a little something besides pay if that was going to be possible. I wanted to act, and acted as hard as ever I could while the acting was going, hoping all the time the major would take notice of me. I never took my eyes off him when he was around, trying to sort of hypnotize him into paying me some especial attention, but it was all no good until the day I run into Anita Lauber on my way to work.

CHAPTER XIII

IT happened for some reason that Axel wasn't with me, and I was walking along the boulevard alone when I heard Anita's voice calling. I turned around in my tracks, and there slowing up at the curb was a baby-blue automobile as big as a bungalow with solid nickel wheels, a colored chauffeur, and Anita seated alone in the tonneau.

"Hello, Bonnie!" she says. "Hop in the boat, honey, and let me drop you where you are going. Hurry, dear, I got a call for nine o'clock."

"So have I," I says a little coldly, but getting in with her just the same. "At Artlife!"

"Stop at the Artlife studios, James," says Anita to the driver. Then she turned to me. "So glad you are working, dear," she says. "I was afraid after that night out at the beach you would be in thoroughly wrong!"

"Oh, no!" says I. "It didn't hurt me any, I guess! Where is your call, Anita?"

"Why, I'm with Muro!" says Anita, opening her pale eyes very wide. "Didn't you know?"

"Not me," says I. "Whose boat is this?"

"It's mine," she says. "Pretty poor, eh? I'm getting three hundred a week and I expect to get seven when this contract runs out."

"Good Lord!" was the best I could think of to say.

Suddenly Anita dropped the little silver box she was carrying—the same one she had unconsciously taken out of her purse before on the day of that party, when she talked to me about going. Well, she dropped it anyways and seized hold of my hands instead.

“Don’t be sore at me, Bonnie,” she says. “I like you better than any girl I know. I’m having a—a wonderful time and—and we each got to live our life and get our jobs in our own way. But please be friends with me! I want you to be friends.”

“Oh, Anita!” I says. “Don’t say it in a tone like that. It ain’t fair. Somehow you make me feel so sorry for you! But asking me to be won’t let you out of your responsibility to yourself. I’ll be friends of course.”

“This car,” she says eagerly, as if justifying herself for something I had not accused her of—“I have bought it on time. I will pay for it out of my salary on installments.”

“Oh, Anita!” I says, which may look like a limited expression but don’t necessarily sound flat when you come to say it. And then we was at my studio.

“Where are you living?” she says. “I want to come and see you if you don’t mind.”

I told her the address, and said yes, do come, because that seemed the only thing I could do. And then I stood and watched the beautiful big blue car drive away, and laughed at myself to think I had anything to offer to its near-owner! I felt sick and puzzled and worried again, the way a person always does when

they run smack up against that sort of thing in this man's business. But I didn't look after Anita long. Pretty soon I give myself a good shake and says "Here, B. McFadden, you poor dumb-bell, you are in the pictures yourself, and ten a day is sixty a week and overtime every night is one hundred and twenty iron men. What are you kicking about?" And then after that I come down to earth and the long crowded dressing room, hurried on my make-up and costume and went out on the set.

But meeting Anita that way give me a depression that kept hanging over me. I got so absorbed in the lowdown I hardly knew what I was doing on the lot that morning and when after lunch we was held up while a party of visitors went over the set I at first paid no attention to them.

I ordinarily would of done so, however, because visitors on a set where someone is working is absolutely against the laws of any self-respecting studio and never allowed unless they are the Elks or new capital or something. I was leaning against a café which is antique French for saloon, because this picture was written before prohibition, and listening in a dumb sort of way to Axel telling me how Silvermount was on the rocks financially, which was by now stale to me. I was more absorbed in saying to myself "I hate the pictures. How can I get out of them and why did I ever get myself into such a hole, anyways?" than in listening to him. Anybody who is in pictures does the same at least once a week.

Well, I was standing that way, when all of a sudden

I got a jolt by Axel saying "Look! That ban Benny Silvermount himself with tha party!"

I took a look then, all right, and it was not Big Benny who caught and held my attention, but Milton Sherrill. Until I saw him I didn't know any man could make my heart leap so, especially with his back turned toward me. But I knew him at once by those square shoulders, the way he stood, and the turn of his head.

Well, it hardly occurred to me to wonder what was he doing there on our lot, he who had the lowdown on pictures to such a strong degree. With him was Trixie Trueman, and her husband, who was in costume and also in liquor as per usual, the studio manager, Mr. Blunt, and a fine-looking youngish man, who was of course Mr. Silvermount, and they was all chinning and kidding along together without more than the merest casual glance at us poor atmosphere animals.

It was pretty plain to see that Big Benny and the Truemans thought Milton a big egg, all right. A queer little stab went through me as I saw Trixie sort of pawing him over with her eyes. He looked like a regular angel out of heaven to me, and while it's the truth I would never in a thousand years have written to him and asked for the job he had offered me on the train, seeing him made things entirely different. He was my reserve. I might get out of this nasty mess of a world I was in, and go to real regular work that would pay me a real honest-to-Gawd salary, even if that work would never make me rich or famous.

But I stood there hesitating while time flew. The

visitors was getting ready to move along and the major and his assistants was getting ready to shoot. Then I decided. I would go. I would catch Milton and ask him. The visitors all started for the exit, he never seeing me, and with a big resolve strong in my heart I broke away from Axel and the pictures forever and started after him. Then all at once the voice of the director, of Major McGee himself, broke upon my ears with the very words of which I had dreamed so long.

"Come here, little girl," he says. "You with the blond curls! I want to speak to you!"

I stopped dead in my tracks. Yes, it was really me he wanted. I watched Milt and the others pass on off the set through a big arched portal that was the gate to the City of Paris, and I didn't mind seeing him go. I forgot every single bad thing I had just been thinking about the pictures. It was my chance! The major had noticed me. I would get a bit, perhaps even a small part. What a poor weak fish I had been to doubt myself even for a moment!

Smiling I walked up to the major and he took hold of my chin and wiggled it while he shook a finger at me.

"See here, young woman!" he says. "You have on a rotten make-up. The mascara from your eyes has run down all over your cheeks. Don't let me catch you on my set like that again. Jasper!" he added to one of the assistants who come by at that moment. "Why the hell can't you see that this mob is made up decently?"

And that was all. Unlike some people in pictures,

I realize that my public has got imagination, and am willing to leave it to them how I felt as I walked away. All through that afternoon the feeling stayed right by me, and all through the first part of the night, too, when we worked on a fire set with the vivid artificial lights making a cold silent furnace in the very middle of sleeping Hollywood.

Ordinarily this working at night under the fierce glares, while the town gradually fell silent and the studio seemed like it was the only place in the world that was awake, struck my dramatic sense and excited me. But to-night nothing could of excited me. You probably know how it feels to make a fool of yourself, and I had done it twice in unusually quick succession. And then at a little before midnight one of them wild rumors that circulates so swift and easy among a crowd of extras come alarmingly to my ears and was presently confirmed by Axel.

"Aye youst hear we bane going ta be paid off," he says. "McGee bane through. They have cut out some sequences from tha picture, and it makes them finished with us to-night!"

"But I thought he said we would work all next week!" I objected, bewildered.

"What they care for that?" he growled. "They youst change their minds, that's all!"

Well, that was bad enough. We had all hoped for another week. But things got even worse when up bounded the woman who dressed next to me.

"The dogs!" she says in that angry half whisper which gets to be a sort of natural voice with atmosphere

people. "The dogs! They are only paying check and a half instead of double check! The stingy brutes!"

"What does she mean, Axel?" I says anxiously. "Is it that we only get time and a half for all this overtime? Why, I thought of course it would be double! Everyone said so, even mommer!"

"Vell, get out your contract and show it and make a fuss!" says Axel with a sickly grin.

And of course that was a joke because extras can't any more get contracts than they can get credit from the grocer. Well, I'll say I needed that thirty which I now wasn't going to get, but I tried to smile.

"That's it!" says Axel. "Yoump along into your street things and we go by Yohn's for a sandwich and tha help of a good strong coffee!"

Well, we cashed in our check and a half, and went along on our way, leaving a seething angry crowd behind us. We was both pretty thoughtful, and why not with the prospect of walking the weary next day because it was by this time well into Sunday morning?

In John's place was the usual crew, some of which were awful wet and noisy and yelling for raw beef sandwiches, and others like ourselves, eating a little something hot after a hard night's work. The low-ceilinged room swam in smoke, both of broiling meat, fried-egg sandwiches and cigarettes. Everybody come there sometime or another, and it was to Hollywood a sort of super-dog-wagon. I don't know could heaven of looked any better to me late at night than John's used to, and I lapped up the food which Axel was so proud to buy me with all the eagerness of one who

knows only too well that they will need all of their strength and must preserve it.

And then, when we finished, we stepped out again into the starlit, perfect California night and commenced to walk slowly homewards, stopping only to buy a couple of Sunday morning papers from a early news bird, and talking moodily but less so on account of the hot food.

When we come to our more or less own front door Axel stopped short and give me a look of horror, his hand as if paralyzed in his pocket.

"May Lord, Aye forgot may key!" he says. "Have you got your key, Bonnie?"

I give a hasty look in my bag, pawing through handkerchief, lipstick and etc. to no avail.

"Of course I haven't got it!" I says at last. "Naturally not, seeing how bad we need it!"

Then the two of us give an instinctive look together up towards the landlady's bedroom windows. Mommer slept at the back, worse luck.

"Bonnie, how much back rent you owe her?" says Axel miserably.

"Four weeks," I says without having to stop and think.

"Aye owe her six," says he. "You better wake her up!"

And so it was me. But two weeks or four was all the same to Mrs. Snifter once she was waked from her natural just sleep! She told the world as she let us in.

"Nice time of the morning to came in, I must say!"

she announced like we was a side show or something. "Disreputable good-for-nothing picture people up drinking and dancing all night and then expecting decent working folks to get up out of their sleep and wait on them."

"Oh, hush, Mrs. Snifter, please!" I says. "You'll wake mommer!"

"And what if I do?" she shouted. "What do I care if she sleeps on a bed that ain't been paid for in four weeks or lies awake on it? It ain't only that you ain't paid your debts, Miss Bonnie Delane, but you have been out all night every night this week. Yes, I know—working! I'll thank you to either pay up or get out not later than to-morrow!"

With which hot one she banged into her own room, leaving me and Axel unable to say one single word on account of not being in any position to.

When I got into my own room and turned on the light and pulled out the bed and sat on the edge of it, to sort of train it that way, because I never could learn to trust it, well, I sat there a few minutes having a hard think.

Just exactly what was I going to do? Nobody had ever been able before this to say I owed them money, and now it was true. If I gave Snifter my whole pay check it would just about square us with her, but we would not be able to eat. And there was no prospects in sight. Adele was broke, I knew. I couldn't fail her, not after all she had done for me. But we must have money quick. It was all bunk, the way we kidded ourselves and got what credit we could on mere hopes

and dreams and elaborate bluffs. Oh, I needed advice and I needed it at once.

When I thought of this I thought somehow of Milton Sherrill, and getting up I dug his photo out of the bureau draw where it had been ever since I left the hotel. I had sort of forgotten Milt until that afternoon. But now I set him up in his place again and talked to that picture of him just like I used to do back home, and as usual he give me good advice. And, believe me, that's all getting good advice ever is—realizing something, and facing it honest as you can.

"Milt," I says, "what would you say I'd better do? Go to work at something? I thought so! What, then? Anything honest to tide over this crisis? All right! But clerking, which is the only thing I know, won't keep both me and mommer. I won't write to you, because that would mean giving up pictures, and I won't give them up, but we have got to eat. What then?"

Well, I swear it seemed as if the eyes of that photograph turned. You know the way eyes in a real good photograph sometimes seem to? I followed where I thought they was looking and saw the morning papers. The Help Wanted column, of course! Right away I picked it up and started to read.

Now when I come to this part of my story I was going to put in what scenario writers call a sequence, which is a section of the continuity from which a movie is actually shot. And this sequence was going to show a full close-up of me reading the fatal ad and registering decision. Then a subtitle reading "Next

Day," and after that I was going to iris-in to a long-shot of me going to answer the ad, dressed in my very plainest clothes and no make-up. Then a medium close-up of me ringing the doorbell of a big house and registering a combination of timidity and despairing sacrifice. The next shot would be a medium shot of a interior—the drawing-room of a home, with a lady hearing a knock. Maid enters. Lady registers "Admit her." Then a medium close-up of me entering. Then a nine-foot shot of me and the lady meeting, the lady seating herself while I remain standing. And so forth.

But come to think it over, I decided this was the kind of a sequence which ought always to be cut out in the first rushes, and discarded, and that its place could be very well taken by a subtitle which would clearly cover a time-lapse and tell what happened to me after my reading that ad in the Sunday paper. And if so, the subtitle would read something like this:

A week later found Bonnie Delane firmly established as a domestic servant in the home of Trixie Trueman, the well-known motion-picture star.

CHAPTER XIV

THE best way to find out why is it people have so much trouble keeping a servant is to be a servant for a while your own self, and after I got my job at Trixie and Taylor Trueman's home I soon decided that the hardest thing to bear was no regular hours. Whoever made up that old quotation about a person cannot burn the candle at both ends had the wrong dope because the Truemans burned not a mere candle but a whole electric dynamo at both ends, and in the middle. Entertain? Sweet daddy! Them Truemans entertained everybody but their servants.

I was maid to Trixie as well as my other duties of waitress and nurse to the kid, a little girl of three. And when Trixie had a call at the studio for nine in the morning it was me had to force her awake, get her up, pump her full of coffee and produce her tooth paint for her to paint her stained teeth with, get on her make-up, find her pair of smoked glasses to save her eyes from the lights, etc., so's she could get to the lot in time and also in fair condition. What she got from me for seventy a month was enough, I'll say! And just think how I used to keep her on a pedestal back home in Stonybrook! I sometimes couldn't realize it for a fact.

The Truemans' house was a new one, built in the conventional wedding-cake architecture which is so

popular in Southern California, and it was out on Santa Monica Boulevard, where a lot of prominent picture people was even then building for the greater convenience of tourists. The Milky Way, this part of the road was called, not on account of milk being the principal liquid consumed there, but on account of being so crowded with stars. There was sleeping porches stuck all over the house, French windows opening into the Spanish patio, and an Irish swimming pool. Well anyways, the pool was lined with green tiles. And since it was out of doors the blue sky reflecting into it made a wonderful effect, and turned the water the color of a aquamarine. This swimming pool was the nicest thing out there, and didn't I crave to get into it, though! However, you know what most employers' attitude towards servants and bathtubs is, and this also of course applied to swimming pools. I used to go down to mommer's on my afternoons off, for mine.

It took considerable courage, too, because as soon as Adele had me safe in the tub she would remove my clothes to where I couldn't reach them very easy, and give me my semiweekly bawling out for being a servant girl. But at the end of each explosion she would generally weaken and forgive me for supporting her and myself by this disgraceful means, give me my clothes back, and leave me return to my life of sin, saying God would reward me. And I would say yes, I was sure He would, only I hoped He would remember the address was Santa Monica Boulevard and not wait for me to come home to heaven and collect.

Adele absolutely refused to give up mommerying me and look for a better paying job.

"Nonsense!" she says when I suggested her doing so. "Bosh! Things will soon get better, honey! They say every cloud has a silver lining, but I always say the silver lining is probably what makes the clouds wear so good!"

And then I would go back to Truemans', cleaner in more ways than one, all refreshed and ready to earn my salary and tips. And I may say that the tips was no light matter, especially if it was a wet night in our dining room, for the girls would then be awful generous about retrieving wraps, and sometimes run as high as fivespots. A person would actually be ashamed to take it, only for realizing that if you didn't get it somebody no more worthy would.

Such nights come along pretty often at our house, Trixie, like most picture people, preferring to entertain in her own home more than outside; and Taylor liked it, also. A lucky thing, because it sure was less trouble to carry him merely upstairs as soon as he got thoroughly wet, than to haul him all the ways back from some outside place or other.

"I don't know how I stand this life, Bonnie!" Trixie says to me one late afternoon when I was up in her bedroom, brushing her lovely brown curls in preparation for a big night. Trixie had the handsomest brown curls I ever seen in my life—twenty of them, full-length, natural curl, and all I had to do when dressing her hair was brush them around my finger a coupla times and hand them to her.

"I'm wore out, Bonnie!" she says to me, blinking hard not to cry and start the mascara running off her eyelashes. "I don't know can I stand it much longer. No more snow parties for mine!"

"Why do you go on them ever, dear?" I says, because naturally after a month in the same house we talked pretty intimate, and in fact she was real hungry for a friend of the female sex that she was not obliged to keep up any front before. "Why don't you cut out the happy dust? Think of your kid, honey! Here—that's the curl that goes on the top."

"I got to keep going!" she says, taking it sadly. "And I don't dare think about Jennie. I got to support her, haven't I?"

"What about friend husband doing a little of that?" I says. "And whatter you mean, support, anyways? You two must be drawing down enough kale to plant a farm!"

"Twenty-two hundred a week," she says mournfully. "I don't know where it goes. We are broke all the time, and the bills we owe! It's a crime!"

"That's no excuse for the dust, hon," I says, bringing her a blue spangled evening dress that made her look like a sparkling infant fairy. "Why not cut it out? You know it'll kill you!"

"I can't!" she says, getting up and clenching her little hands. "You don't know, Bonnie, what it means to work in comedy! They never let you off of playing it, day or night. If only I could quit being my gay screen self when I leave the lot, but I can't. Why, what would happen if I didn't stay in character? They'd say I

was going stale, that's what, and the rumor would spread and spread until it ruined me! I'm a madcap on the screen, so I got to be one off it too."

"Refuse to be," I says briefly.

"Oh, that's a cinch to say!" says she. "But you know it can't be done. There is always a reporter around, or a producer on the party, or a director that's set your character for you, and you got to have a lot of pep! At first it was fun and I didn't mind. It come easy and natural to be gay all the time. But now I been a wild woman for six years steady, except when I was sleeping—sleeping under a bromide! And a person's own pep soon wears off. I have to take something to jazz me up, Bonnie; I have to, dear!"

"Mister ought to do something about it," I says. "Oh, Trixie, you got a right to your husband's money and to his care. Make him do it!"

"Huh!" says she, buffing her nails like she wished they was his face. "Huh! Fat chance! He and Tommy has just taken a bungalow up in Laurel Cañon. You know what that means. They think I don't know it, but a wife has always got a friend to come and spill that sort of dirt to her! And as for money, do you know how much he give that bootlegger yesterday? Fifteen hundred, cash! And me obliged to hock my diamonds to meet the installment on our new car! Happy dust? Liquor? Why not, Bonnie, why not?"

"Oh, hon, every reason why not!" I says, and then Trixie heard her husband yelling in the hall for her to hurry.

So she took a shot out of the lovely silver flask on

her dresser, and beat it down to her gay dinner party.

I went on up to my own room, feeling kind of groggy in the other sense, the way I always did after a talk like that, which we were having them more and more frequent. The funny part was, I couldn't get sore at Trixie. She was a kid at heart, and so refined-looking, but without any real brains or training, and she was caught in a kind of trap. That is what success had meant to her—a trap.

Well, I'll say I was learning something about the moving-picture business every day, even if I wasn't at a studio! And one of the lines I decided on was that I would never, no, never, lose my bean like the Truemans had, and throw my money away. Which it was of course easy to say while I was not even in the pictures as yet, and I was as safe making that resolve as a millionaire socialist in declaring for a soviet in America.

Keeping open house the way they did the Truemans naturally kept it in the open part, meaning in the patio. And for the benefit of those that don't understand Spanish, let me explain. A patio is to a house what the hole is to a doughnut. In other words, the house is built around it, with the patio left open. The swimming pool was right square in the middle of it, and the dining room, parlor and den all opened out on it direct. There was a palmetto growing in one corner of it, and a orange tree in the other, while green Spanish tiles grew all around the edge. Sitting in the nursery window of a Sunday afternoon Jennie and me could see all of it pretty plain, and read our book of fairy stories

which I had bought her on account of her never having, until I come into the house, heard of Goldilocks or Little Red Riding Hood, and I think it is wrong not to teach a kid those great truths.

Also, sitting there I could recall how when I first come West I had thought that maybe some day I would be at the swimming-pool parties of some big egg, and then I would think well, here I am! Well anyways, we could sit there and see the party, and I could also see the bell rung for me, if anyone rang it. Every Sunday things would go pretty nearly the same.

About 11.30 Tom, who was Taylor Trueman's dresser, would bring out a big table and set it with half a dozen bottles of Scotch and rye and bowls of ice and a dozen or so glasses and siphons, cigarettes and a percolator of coffee, and then everything would be ready for Sunday dinner. Everything but the host and hostess, anyways.

The guests would commence to float in early. Regulars, mostly, some already in bathing suits under a wrap, and some at once walking into the bath house and borrowing the first suit they seen there. They would stroll around the place, swimming a few strokes, sunning theirselves afterward, highball and cigarette in hand, and then after a while Trixie would appear in her one-piece, and after a little more of a while Taylor would show, and they would all play like kids, talking, splashing, smoking, drinking, and so forth and so on, and on, and on, a new record on the phonograph for every new drink. Then by sunset they would just merely move into the house itself, and continue. Some

Sunday dinner! But then of course if you are in pictures you must not eat too much for fear of gaining.

Well anyways, one particular Sunday that I am telling you about, I got to watching the crowd circulate, and I didn't notice how little Jennie had got away from me until I seen her dancing across the patio below, chasing Fluff, the small white dog belonging to my boss. At the same moment, almost, who should come in the door but Anita Lauber, and with her that chunky blond play writer and director, Jack Blum, with whom she was chatting like they was intimate friends.

The sight of Anita in that house give me a jolt, I'll tell the world! It didn't seem fair, somehow, that she should be there as a guest, when everybody knew about her character, and here was I, a mere servant! Something in me got up and yelled in silent protest; yelled it hard. And any girl which was raised in New England, where they would rather die than be a servant, will understand. Was there really no penalty for going on the loose in that crowd? Did everything get by? Would nobody snub you or shake a cold shoulder, no matter what a girl did? I'll say it looked that way!

Anita was dressed beautiful, in blue satin sports clothes. She had snap to every inch of her. I looked down at my black dress and white apron, and Lord, how I hated my job at that minute!

No use in telling myself what I knew to be the fact—that those people down there in the patio was not the real topside picture people; not in the class with Mary

and Doug and Charlie and their set, or in the class with the great writers like Mr. and Mrs. Greyton, or so forth, and that therefore I was every bit as good as them and etc. I felt menial and ashamed of it, yet could only set there wrapping my hands in my apron and hoping to heaven Anita and Blum would go away soon, although that was hoping against too much, for they had brought their bathing suits.

"Sweet daddy," I thought, "I suppose the ocean is now too vulgar for Anita to wash in it, that she has got to come here!"

Trixie had never spoke of Anita, but they kissed when they met, so they must of met once or twice before. Funny, but Milton Sherrill was the only one I had thought of, and dreaded meeting in the True-mans' house, and Trixie had told me she had never seen him before or since that day on the DuMas Pear set. I had never even dreamed of seeing Anita there.

Well anyways, just as Anita had got hold of a highball and I had got hold of myself a little better, that beast of a small white dog of ours had to go and jump into the pool with all its fur on, so of course Jennie had to jump in after it with all her clothes on.

Right away there was a lot of grief from below and my bell started ringing like mad. Seeing the kid in the water, I jumped up and ran downstairs. I had to. And at that very instant the front door opened and in come Greg Strickland.

While I stood there paralyzed, from the other way come Anita, waving her highball at me frantically, and

down the center charged Trixie Trueman, holding out a wet and screaming child to me, the child holding out a wet and barking pup.

One of the strangest things in the world is the way we keep thinking our friends is less decent than we are; less kind or generous, and always having that first blind instinct of mistrust.

The very moment I had clasped that wet dog and child to my bosom, and stood hugging them and trying to comfort the two of them, while Trixie disgustedly wiped a few drops of water off the front of her bathing suit with a lace handkerchief—well, at that very minute I realized I had done Anita a injustice. I had expected she would pretend not to recognize me, and here she was as glad to see me as could be.

“Bonnie darling!” she cried, running up and giving me a kiss across my wet armful. “So this is where you been hiding! Look at the cap and apron! My heaven, have you gone cuckoo, or what?”

“Good Lord, Bonnie!” says Stricky, turning first red and then white. “Say listen! You have stuck it out in your own way, haven’t you?”

CHAPTER XV

I COULDN'T stand any more, but turned and run upstairs with the dog and the baby. Somehow the minute I seen Stricky, all his terrible charm swept back over me. He upset me from the roots, so to speak, and it was a kind of attraction that give me more worry than pleasure. I hated him, I disapproved of him, I had good cause to mistrust him, and yet when I come face to face with him, all I could think was how handsome he was. So I ran. In a minute Trixie was after me, helping with the kid for once in her life, but talking like a whirlwind as she done so.

"Whatter you want to let them hand me a haymaker like that for, Bonnie?" she says. "Why, Anita Lauber says you are a wonderful actress, a regular knockout, and that you got a big future. Why didn't you tell me, dear?"

"I'm not!" I says. "I only want to be! And I'd been out of a job so long——"

And then we done considerable kissing and crying, as might of been expected of women, and when the kid was dry and the dog ditto, nothing would satisfy Trixie but that I should come down to the patio and have a celebration held over me.

"Ain't we got fun?" Trixie shouted to the crowd as she dragged me down without even letting me take off

my apron. "Here I been employing a angel unawares, so to speak!"

And greatly to my surprise, Stricky backed her up.

"You got right, Trixie, old dear!" he says. "She's a little saint, as I know to my sorrow. She's got an idea that it is possible to get into the pictures without a friend."

Well, if looks could of murdered, the one Trixie flashed him should of knocked him cold. She drew herself up with pride, and took hold of my hand.

"She's right," says Trixie hotly. "It is possible to get in without a pull if you've got friends to help you. And I'm going to help Bonnie. Hey, take a good look at her, Stricky. Do you see what I see?"

Stricky stared at me hard for a moment, and then he gave a long whistle.

"Ain't she just the type Nickolls is looking for?" Trixie demanded. "What we were talking about yesterday?"

"You said it!" says Stricky. "Of course she is!"

"What's this?" I says. "Am I a type, or something?"

"You are," says Trixie. "And I'm going to lead you down to the studio in the morning and show you to Nicky. It's for the piece Stricky is acting in with me. We just commenced making it, and we need a girl that won't cut in on me any, see? A utterly different type from me for contrast, and somebody who won't ask for their name on the bill, because I wouldn't stand for that, of course. Nicky's had a bunch of them up, because he always does his own casting. But naturally, when I am the star, I pass on the girls, and none

of these have got by me. You'll do, if Nicky O. K's you."

"Oh, Trixie—honest?" I gasped.

"You been awful good to me and Jennie, hon," says she. "And now I can repay it, that's all! You won't mind doing a slavey, while I wear the clothes, will you?"

"Why say!" I says with my first real laugh in some time. "That'll only be casting us in character, won't it? Just let me at a chance to act, that's all!"

That night I couldn't go to sleep, even after the noise in the patio had died away. I just lay there on my narrow bed up under the roof, and drank in the wonder smells and sounds of the night; the odor of eucalyptus leaves burning or dried, the odor of oil and the thump of the oil pumps, the odor of cedar logs burning. The Coast! The Coast! Magic!

And tomorrow Nickolls, the stern, hard-lipped young director. Would I get by? To play in a picture with Trixie and with Stricky! And so Stricky was an actor now! He was playing the juvenile, opposite Trixie. I must have made a mistake about Stricky. He was charming, he was kind. Anita had said I would have to pay to get into the pictures. Anita was mistaken. You could go straight, even in Hollywood. You could have kind women friends who would help you. How pleased mommer would be. So pleased, dear mommer! I would telephone her if I got by. No more needless disappointments for mommer. If I made good she would know. If I made a flop why tell her? And Anita. How white she was, with her little

silver box dangling from her wrist. I knew what was in it now. Happy dust. Poor Anita. And so forth.

I am supposed to be thinking all of the above, see? I'm laying there and dreaming, only awake, and those are the things which kept going through my head, in a kind of confused cloud.

The next morning, when it finally come, didn't seem a whole lot more real than these dreams I have been describing. I put on my synthetic tailor suit which mommer had reconstructed for me, and Trixie took me along on her ten o'clock call.

Well, only a person which had gone through what I had at Silvermount can imagine fully how I felt driving up to the main entrance of the lot with Trixie Trueman in her big yellow roadster and parking, nose in, right between Nickolls' shabby old Colby-Droit that everybody knew but nobody laughed at, and Benny Silvermount's bright new foreign car with its queer special body. Class? I'll say so! Scared as I was I could not help but get quite a kick out of even that simple thing, not to mention that when we went in the lobby the girl behind the little window smiled all over her map, touched a button in haste—and the door wearing the Keep-Out—This-Means-You sign, flew open to let I and Trixie through.

The Silvermount lot now seemed like Paradise or something to me, with its well-kept patches of lawn and flowering trees and bushes between the enormous buildings. I gaped around at the stages, which many of them are three or even four hundred feet long, and at the massive technical department and laboratory,

where they develop the fillums and etc., and cut out your best footage when you are not looking. And also at the wardrobe building and the high-class dressing-room house that had a six-hundred-foot front. And many other features and advantages, which I took in with awe, for all the architecture was pretty much on the same style as a lot of Greek temples turned into something useful, if you can imagine what I mean.

Trixie being used to them paid no attention to these wonders, but at once grabbed me by the arm and started dragging me off towards where a man was standing under a fig tree. His back was to us, and he was entirely absorbed in absorbing figs. He was dressed in corduroy riding breeches, and soft shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and a wrist watch, the national costume of motion-picture directors since time immemorial. And he was some fig eater, for he would reach up, pick a fig off the topmost branch, split it open with one squeeze, bite its heart out and throw away the skin all in about one second.

And it wasn't until we was almost up to this savage that I realized he was the great John Austin Nickolls, and when I did realize, no kidding, I begun to worry for fear he might bite my head off, the same as a fig, for I remembered the first day I seen him, when he roared at poor Axel like a dog because Axel had stopped to speak to me.

But I need not of been so afraid, after all, for when he turned around and saw it was Trixie he give her the sweetest smile I ever seen, and shook his big mat of yellow curls like a friendly dog.

"Hello, hellcat," he says real pleasant. "How's tricks?"

"Pretty good, all but my head!" says she.

"Wish you had invited me!" he says with a grin. "Do I get introduced?" he went on, looking at me, interest springing up sudden in his keen blue eyes.

"My friend Miss Delane," says Trixie. "I thought she might do for my foil in *The Mischief Maker*. What about it?"

"I'm glad to meet you, Miss Delane," says Nickolls in quite a new voice; a sincere, musical voice, with a high-class genuine English accent. "Indeed I believe I'm going to be exceptionally glad to meet you."

"Pleased!" I managed to gulp.

But I liked him right away. He looked to be real all the way through. Something in me recognized him. I don't know any other way to tell what I mean. I didn't fall in love, not then nor ever, with him. But I knew him right away.

"Isn't she the type?" says Trixie. "She's a friend of mine. I can work with her, I know." Then she whispered in his ear, but I couldn't help but hear. "Cheap!" she says. "And you know how Benny is acting about salaries just now!"

He nodded and kept on looking at me thoughtfully. And of course that made me stand awkward and look awkward, not to mention feeling ditto. But there was nothing personal in the way he give me the up and down. Then he smiled again, that wonderful smile.

"Had any experience, Miss Delane?" he says so suddenly that I give a jump.

For a second I was going to shoot him the conventional "Oh, lots," when some instinct made me change my mind. In the face of the first real man I had met in this business, except Rolf, why I just plain decided I would be real too. I'd take a chance.

"No," I blurted at him. "Practically none. Atmosphere and a few amateur theatricals."

"Well, I see you're not a liar, anyway," says he cheerfully, as though that was a sign of hope. "I wonder if you can act, and whether you screen? Ever had a test made that we could see?"

"No," says I.

He got silent again, looking at me and scratching his curls first on one side and then on the other.

"Well," he says at last, "she really is the type for that slavey. Pretty, but no doll. If she can act a comedy part I——Hey, Joe!"

A man was crossing the next path to us, but at this call he stopped and come back.

"Say, Joe," says Mr. Nickolls, "is there anybody working on Number Four? No? Fine! Say, just take a camera over there, will you! I want to make a test."

I don't really know how I got to Trixie's dressing room, but somehow I did, she laughing and pulling me by the arm. When I come to from the shock I was seated in front of her enormous lace-trimmed dressing table, putting on make-up. And in such a dressing room! Pink taffeta curtains and pink satin furniture, and a gray velvet rug. A tiled bathroom beyond on one side, and on the other side, near the head of the

stairs, a sitting room, belonging to Trixie, too, also in rose silk and gray velvet. Nickolls was walking up and down in there throwing cigarette ashes on the floor and playing the elegant phonograph that was hidden in the base of a big gold lamp with a Jap silk shade. Nickolls was waiting for me!

I heard him yell down to somebody on the lot to run over on his set and tell them he would be a few minutes late. On my account! Sweet daddy! I could hardly manage to get ready, fumbling among Trixie's things, which included dead roses, two half-empty bottles of Scotch, and a spilled ounce of twenty-dollar perfume which hung heavy in the air. My head reeled with it and with excitement. Then at last I was all set.

"You'll do, dear!" says Trixie, and then we all went down the stairs and across to Number Four Stage.

Next thing I knew Nickolls give me a few instructions and then his business voice was yelling.

"Lights!" he says. "Camera! Now come in, Miss Delane! Walk across! Open that door! Horror! More horror! That's right! Slam the door! That'll do! Now go back and come in again. Cross to the window and see something funny in the street below. Now somebody is coming upstairs, and you have no business in this room. They will catch you! Hide under the table. That's it! That's it! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Ho, ha—Oh, that's great! That's great! You're a scream, kid, you're a scream! If that screens for a cent you're hired! You're hired! That's enough!"

The lights went off, and still Nickolls was wiping his

eyes and laughing and wiping them again. Trixie, who had stuck by, turned to me, and her manner had something funny the matter with it.

"Don't overdo it, hon!" she says, kind of sharp. Then she turned on her director. "Well, Nicky!" she says. "I never got a laugh like that out of you! I hope you enjoyed yourself!"

"I'll say I did!" says he. "And I'm much obliged to you for bringing her. We will look at the test at the morning rushes. Now don't get sore, cutie; she will be a great little foil for your beautiful black hair."

Trixie smiled at him, her peeve vanishing quick as it had come, as was her usual way. Then Nickolls stepped over and took both my hands in his.

"I hope to God you screen!" he says solemnly. "Because if you do we sure can work together. I can't ask you to see the test tomorrow, because that is against our rules here. We like to be absolutely free to comment, you know. But I'll telephone you the result. Good-by!"

I walked away on air, while Trixie of course went off to work. Back at her house I did my chores as usual, but they didn't seem real or anything like it.

The Truemans didn't come home to dinner that night, but blew in with a noisy crowd around two o'clock and turning on the electric piano, danced until somewheres around four. Maybe that was what made Trixie so sore and short with me when I helped her to dress the next, or rather I should say, the same morning. Not a word out of her about anything Nickolls might of said, or anything! So I let her alone, aside

from dressing her, and when she had gone off to the studio I faced a morning of worry the equal of which I have never endured before or since.

You see I didn't even know what rushes was, or when they might happen. Of course I have since found out that rushes are the shots which have been made the day before, and which are developed and shown to the director and department heads and sometimes to the star, just as they come on the reel of fillum, not even cut into rough continuity. And the object of this first showing is merely to see if the photography is any good. Then next day the takings of the previous day is by now in rough continuity, and is shown again, and so on, the improvements of one day being shown the next until it is complete, along with the daily new raw shootings which the directors bring in. It is a sort of endless chain, a mill, through which a picture is ground to the accompaniment of scathing remarks, criticism and suggestions from the heads.

The cutter and a stenog sits there under a shaded lamp and takes it all down, and then they carry the fillum back to the laboratory and make the changes and improvements and etc. The usual fillum will be run at least twenty times by the heads before it is O.K.'d. And it is at these rushes, which are generally pulled off between twelve and one on most lots, that a test is generally shown.

And well, all I can say is that if I had that morning known as much about the rush hour as I do now I would not of lived to be writing this! Sweet daddy, I would of been too nervous! I would not even of had

strength to stagger to the telephone when at last it rang at 1:15. I hardly made it, anyways. I was so shot with excitement I could hardly pluck the blue silk doll off that phone to answer it. And then when I did, over the wire come Nickolls' voice.

"Test was a big hit, Miss Delane," says he. "Could you run right down to my office and talk over terms?"

CHAPTER XVI

“NICKOLLS,” says Greg Strickland, leaning against the steeple of the Metropolitan Tower — “Nickolls is in a class by himself.”

“Yeh! He’d have to go a long ways back before he met anyone,” I says, sitting down on a corner of Trinity Churchyard, which happened to be alongside of it. “And, he sure does shake a wicked megaphone!”

We had been working three weeks on *The Mischief Maker*, I at one hundred berries a week, and I’ll say earning it too. But for the moment I had put down the scrub brush and mop and pail of suds which was the principal ingredients of my costume, and Strick and I was parked on a jumbled-up discarded New York set, waiting for our call while Nicky struggled with our star. Trixie was playing a legitimate part for the first time, and he was sure handling her wonderful.

“Say listen, Bonnie, you are no slouch in this picture yourself!” Stricky declared.

“Huh!” says I, because that was the most cutting remark I could think of.

“Really you are a wonderful actress,” says Stricky earnestly. “And you’ve got a big future!”

Well, of course that is the best compliment one person in Hollywood can pay another, and so I weakened a little toward him.

“Why do you keep away from me all the time, Bon-

nie?" he says then. "Do you realize that this is actually the first time you have given me the chance to speak to you alone? What's wrong, eh?"

For a moment I was knocked so cold by that I couldn't answer. And then I found my voice and went right for him.

"After all the grief you made for me," I says, "you dare to pull a line like that! After the lies you told me to get me out here!"

"What lies?" says Stricky. "What are you getting at? I told you that you could get seventy-five a week in pictures, and you are getting a hundred!"

"That's so," I had to admit. "But it's not the point. You get me perfectly!"

"I'd give anything in the world to get you!" he says, lowering his voice. "Bonnie, I'm simply cuckoo about you!"

The follow-up I had all prepared died on my lips. Stricky was playing a sort of light-heavy part in this piece, and with his make-up of smart afternoon clothes, his hair like varnished leather, the powder on his face giving it the smooth beauty of a child's, he was enough to wreck anybody's peace.

"You are going to be a big hit, girlie," he went on. "And worth a lot of money. Everybody on this lot is strong for your work. You ought to of heard old Benny himself at the rushes yesterday. He stood up and hollered."

"Oh, Stricky!" I says.

"I know I've been a sort of a rotter in some ways," Stricky went on, "but after all, you would never have

come out here except for me. And if I exaggerated about myself a little back in Stonybrook, it was because I was wild over you, even then. You are going far, girlie, and I don't want you to leave me behind."

"I won't, Stricky," I says, all milk and water inside myself. "You know I won't. And I will be friends from now on."

"I'll make you more than friends, sweetheart!" says Stricky.

And then he kissed my hands and dropped them. And get this—there was no camera on us, either! It was romance with a capital Row, all right! Every bitter thought or feeling I had about him was wiped out, and the old attraction, which I had been fighting off all this time, come back with a rush. But we couldn't say anything more just then because Nickolls come roaring up, his curls shaking with excitement like a angry lion's mane.

"Why the Silvermount doesn't go broke is more than I can tell!" he growled. "Here I ask for a camel for the Egyptian sequence for ten this morning sharp, and what happens? Is the camel here? No! He's out on a lecture tour with the Blue Law Boobs, or something! Anyway nobody knows anything about him. The blessed saints preserve us! We are paying Trixie three hundred and fifty dollars a working day, and because some ass forgot to get the camel she can't work! Not to mention the rest of you. It makes me sick!"

"Thank heaven it's not my money!" says Strick.

"Bah!" says Nicky. "The same thing runs through every detail of the business. And then I catch hell from

the office because it costs a hundred thousand dollars to make a fifty-thousand-dollar picture! Look at yesterday too! Two hundred atmosphere people at ten a day each, on that ballroom set from nine in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon, and not a foot of film could be shot because the fuses went blooey, and the electricians were all somewhere else! Then when I actually got fuses in again, the crowd looked so dog-tired that I will probably have to make the scene over when I see the rushes!"

"Why don't you tell them at the office?" I says.

"Tell them, hell!" says he. "What's the use, when jobs are given out through friendship instead of on a basis of merit? How long will it last? Heaven only knows. Art is a business, little Bonnie, and until the producers find that out they will have only this half-satisfactory hybrid, that is art by accident and business by luck!"

"But I thought art was all loose ends, Nicky," I says. "Meals any old time, getting up late, acting as you please, and being generally unreliable."

"Say listen, child!" says he. "What have you been doing these last few weeks? Getting to bed early, coming on the lot, rested, at nine prompt. Sometimes at eight. Working like a slave all day and going home dead to the world. Right?"

I nodded.

"A chore!" says he. "That's what it's been! A tiresome grind. Playing the same scene over and over, waiting around with your nerves and your patience almost worn out. Yes? And if you haven't produced

one of the finest bits of art I ever saw I'll eat the film. Art, little Bonnie, means working like hell."

"Well, thanks of course," I says. "But who is to blame in most pictures, Nicky?"

"Easy money is to blame," says he gloomily. "That is, if any one thing is to blame. Pictures are so big. It takes so many people to make a picture. The story-writer, the scenario editor, the continuity writer, director, architect, builders, electricians, the actors of course. The chap who writes the titles, the technical man who cuts the film. It is, in my opinion, absolutely impossible to state that any one of these people is most responsible for the merit of the finished product. The only person in the outfit whose relation to the picture is absolutely defined is the producer—the man in the office—the money man. And he is nothing in the world but a middleman. The rest of us are all merging, constantly. We are indispensable strands of the same web. It would fall apart without any one of us, you see. There! Let's go eat, and by the time we are through, that damn camel may have shown up!"

So I and Strick and the boss went and ate avacado salad and coffee in the big cafeteria across the way, because we was naturally all of us dieting, even myself, now that I was in the pictures, for although I had not put on any weight, mommer was already insisting on me not taking any chances.

Well anyways, there we sat and dieted amidst all the other dieting hams and camera men and authors and atmosphere and so forth, both in costume and out,

with the clatter of knives and plates and the usual blue haze of cigarette smoke of both sexes, but my mind was not on what I was doing.

I couldn't help but realize how true every word Nicky had spoke was, now that he had mentioned it. Right away I could think of a dozen people on our lot who was there because of being somebody's sweetie or cousin or particular friend. Why even I myself was there because of Trixie having brought me and said I was a friend of hers. And if I had made good, why that was a mere happy accident. Not that Nicky would of hired me if I had been a clown, because Nicky was one of them magnificent exceptions to the rule in pictures that have saved pictures from the scrap heap. But generally speaking it would of been that way.

And naturally I thought then of Axel, who had been hounding me to introduce him to Nicky. Axel was a natural-born extra, and hadn't the brains to be anything else ever. Not that he knew it, of course. And for a few moments I thought "Well, now I am in an awkward jam." And then I decided, "Well, this is an exceptional case. Axel has been an awful good friend to me and I really owe him something. So what harm to bring him on the lot and introduce him to Nicky and simply say nothing about him except only, 'This is a personal friend of mine, he's got a big future and etc. and anything you can do for him, why I will appreciate it?'"

Well anyways, after lunch the camel had come, but it was so late that Nicky says, "Go on home, little Bonnie, you are not in the camel sequence and we will not

get around to your bit to-day." Which is far more consideration than most directors show, and they will usually let you wait around just on general lack of principle.

Well, I went home, like he said, feeling very glad and happy, because now I had somebody to moon over, and every girl needs it, and Stricky sure could vamp me when he tried.

Also I was glad to go home to mommer, even if we was still living in that horrible place on Vine Street with Mrs. Snifter. Mommer had insisted that we should stay on, because of it being so cheap.

"Until we buy you a decent wardrobe," says Adele, "this is where we stay, and the money goes on your back. They say clothes don't make the man, but I always say hats of a feather flock together."

And that ended any moving for the present. One luxury Adele did allow us, though; and that was a phonograph. To be sure it was merely a fifty-dollar one, and the only period case it had was the Installment Period, but she got also some A1 jazz numbers for it, and I felt it kind of established us in a community where no phonograph was almost a bigger disgrace than no toothbrush.

Well anyways, this day I am telling you about, I come home from the studio, and rushed up the stairs to the tune of Kick Me Around on the Hardwood, the sweet strains of which was eliminating from our flat and phonograph, and found that mommer had a surprise for me. Mommer always had a surprise for me, even if it was only a please-remit slip, but as a general

rule it was a hot spice cake, a new veil or a jar of some sort of make-up specialty that she thought would improve me. And this time the surprise was my own name in print.

"Look, dear!" she says the very minute I got inside. "See what I cut out of Wid's and also from the Mirror this morning!"

And it was this way that I seen my first press notices. Some notices, they was, too! Sweet daddy! No others has ever looked so big to me. And this is what they says:

Among the cast supporting Trixie Trueman in *The Mischief Maker*, a comedy by Harold Greyton, which will be the charming little star's next release, are Helen Stowell, Robert Strickland, Ellen More, Tom Wells, Bonnie Delane, Hick Trowbridge and the famous Silvermount collie dog, Snap. The picture is being directed by John A. (Nicky) Nickolls.

Quite a long notice, I'll say! And the fact that both notices was exactly alike and had therefore probably been sent out from the Silvermount's own office hung no crepe in my young life! I was in the paper, in the professional trade papers, and that was enough for me. And when on top of all this mommer actually produced the same identical clipping from that very morning's *Lost Angeles Times'* motion-picture column, I felt like a million dollars.

"Oh, mommer!" I says. "I'm really in! Now watch me soar!"

"I'd rather see you driving a tin lizzie along a safe road at fifteen an hour," says mommer, "than to see

you go up in any aëroplane. You'd stay where you was going, longer."

A day or two later Adele and Axel and me read another kind of notice yet, and it come out of a newspaper which a person couldn't see, nor put their hands on it, but which is a real news sheet, just the same, and one is published on every lot, I'll say it is! And by this I mean that invisible daily, The Lowdown, which spreads news around in motion-picture circles probably more quickly than in any other branch of life. When anything big happens on a lot everybody knows it in advance as you might say. And it's a funny thing how often these lowdown rumors will turn out to be correct.

It was a press notice of this brand that Axel handed us at breakfast one morning when The Mischief Maker was all but finished. There was a couple of retakes to be made and then we would be through. I say "we" because Axel was by now working in the picture on account of my having introduced him to Nicky and Nicky had of course hired him—for the atmosphere crowd. Nicky had merely talked to Axel for three minutes and then said, "Yes, I can use you in the ballroom scene," in a tone which left no hope. Nicky was certainly different from most directors, even then.

Well anyways, Axel was working for Silvermount, and as usual mommer was giving both of us a 7:30 hot cup of coffee before going to work, just like in the old days, when Axel sprung his piece of information.

"Ay understand you ban Big Benny's best bet now, Bonnie," says Axel.

"That so?" says I. "Fat chance, Axel! Why, I'm just a feeder for Trixie. I've seen the rushes, and I dunno—they look rotten to me. I'm a fright in the make-up. Dirty servant girl."

"Ay heard the camera feller, Joe, say you bane absolutely something new."

Mommer and I exchanged a significant female look at that, because being considered something new is going some in pictures. Axel went on.

"Ay heard you ban offered a six-picture contract," says he. "Ay hear every place you ban in strong. Nickolls wanted your name should be on the cast but Trueman got sore. Ay tank you walk away with the picture sure, Bonnie."

Again mommer and me exchanged a wireless. Of course we knew that I had made pretty good, and in the rushes I had seen that I had done about what they wanted of me. I had stumbled over pails of water, fallen off of stepladders, cooked a bowl of pet goldfish, and other humorous incidents until it was a wonder I had a bone left in my body, and me with no personal insurance either.

I had done all this without cracking a smile before the camera; and indeed why would I smile? But Nicky seemed to think it was wonderful that I didn't, because naturally every time I got hurt the rest of the people on our set including Nicky himself would set up a roar. Right up to the end of the picture I kept my face. Then when I heard the bad news at the end of

the story, why, I smiled. The smile you all know so well.

Well anyways, I had tried to do what they wanted, as I say. But up to now, with the job all but finished, nobody had even delicately hinted at a reëngagement. Not a soul had murmured that sweet word "contract" in my willing ear, and so far as I knew, by the end of the week I would again be admiring the boulevards from morning until night.

"That's a swell contract you tell about, Axel," says I. "But it's a stranger to me. Where do you get this dope, eh?"

"Pretty straight," he says. "A fellar told may that Joe told him, and Joe, he bane got it from Ed, tha operator of tha head's private projection room. Ed heard Big Benny told tha production manager to tell Nickolls to sign you up."

"Oh, dearie, I'll bet you it's true!" says mommer. "Why, that's first-hand, almost! Now if they send for you, send for me first! Be sure to, Bonnie. When I was Helena Holman's mother it was me got her twice the money they offered her at first. Always take your mother with you, hon, when you go about a contract, and look perfectly blank and round-eyed while I talk. There is something about a picture actress' mother makes producers fairly sick the very minute they see her coming, and they at once give better terms in despair."

"Sweet daddy, I only hope you have the chance to scare 'em!" says I. "But I don't know. I have already got the I'm-almost-out-again blues."

But Axel was pretty near right. For that very day things began to move for me, and move fast.

I was on the lot early, all made up, bucket of suds, mop, ruffled hair and all, for the retake of a long-shot. This was being left to a boy named Louie, one of Nicky's assistant directors. It was an unimportant shot which had merely had something wrong in the background, or Nicky would of done it himself, but this day he didn't appear to be at the studio. Well, we went out on the location, Louie and me, and he made the retake a couple of dozen times on account of being desperately afraid of not pleasing Nicky and consequently shooting about six hundred feet in order to get a sixty-foot scene.

And when we come in around noon I was only too glad to crawl up to my little cubby of a dressing room and change, my mind less on my art than on a glass of milk and a chicken sandwich.

I was just reveling in the thought of them the way a person will, when Eddie the call boy knocked on the door and says I am wanted on the phone and I went, thinking probably it was mommer to say "Don't forget to stop for the laundry on your way home," or some such excitement. But when I says "Yes, it is me speaking," this is what I heard.

"Miss Delane, this is Mr. Silvermount," says the voice.

Well, naturally for a minute I was jolted and then I come down to earth.

"Oh, sure it is!" I says, thinking of course it was Stricky or somebody trying to be funny. "Yes, Benny

dear, I suppose you are offering me a contract or something! Well, I couldn't accept, thanks, unless it's very good. Muro and everyone is showering me with offers, kid!"

"I got no doubt of it," says the voice, kind of dry and shortlike. "But I guess you and me can arrange satisfactory terms, Miss Delane, if you drop around by my office about 2:30 this afternoon."

"My dear Mr. Silvermount!" I says, very affected. "I rully don't know do I care to continue acting at all! Say, child, I'd rather you'd offer me a real lunch than a fake contract!"

"Say, Miss Delane, are you crazy, or what?" says the voice. "There is nothing fake about this contract and I got it a luncheon engagement already."

A terrible cold sensation come over me at that. I don't believe I ever felt sicker; no, not even when I had the measles.

"Don't tell me you really are Mr. Silvermount?" I says weakly.

"Who else?" says the voice impatiently. "And you can come at 2:30 or not, just as you please."

CHAPTER XVII

THE receiver was hung up with a snap, and I staggered back to my dressing room calling myself fool, idiot, nitwit, and all the other uncomplimentary names I could think of, but getting mighty little comfort out of doing so. I had sassed the Big Egg himself, the one person on the lot which everybody was afraid of and treated with respect. My heaven, I had called him Benny! I had called him kid!

What should I do? That was the point. If I went to the office at 2:30 very likely I would be politely kicked out. As a matter of plain fact the more I looked at the jam I was in the clearer it seemed to me that I had wrecked my chance of ever working for Silvermount again. There would be no good trying to explain, the conversation had been too kind of natural for that. If only it had been any person in the world except Big Benny, the sacred, the upstage iceberg of the picture world! Sweet daddy, some grief!

Slowly I got dressed, forgetting I had ever been hungry and put all my mind on getting home and telling mommer. Oh, boy, it would take courage, for what she would say to me would be enough! And then just as I was ready to leave, that fresh Eddie, the w.k. call boy, called again, and this time he had a package for me.

Well, naturally I thought "Here is that make-up I ordered," because it was that sort of a neat kind of bundle, and I come pretty near not opening it. But then I thought, "Well, I will get out that lipstick; I really need it," and untied the string; and there inside was not the make-up at all, but the cutiest Kewpie doll I ever seen. It was dressed like a bride, mostly veil and smile, and for a second I pretty near forgot my troubles when I seen it. Then I opened the note which lay on top of it, and forgot my trouble entirely if temporarily. The present was from Stricky.

"Dear B.," he wrote on his card. "Just saw this and thought of you. Hope you will like it. Will you eat with me at Marcelle's to-night at seven? Devotedly Stricky. P. S. I hear you are signing up to be featured by Silvermount. Congratulations!"

My heart just pumped like an oil well, with richness and pleasure. Dear Stricky! How cute of him to think of me and send me such a beautiful present! I done the doll up again and tucking it under my arm started for home in a far better state of mind when who in the lower entrance hall would I bump into but Nickolls.

"Hello there, little Bonnie," says he. "Where are you going with that shining face?"

"Oh, my Lord, does it?" I says anxiously, feeling for my powder rag.

"No, no; your nose looks as if you had been smelling a flour barrel!" he says, laughing. "Come on, walk as far as the corner of the boulevard with me. I have an important conference luncheon over at Frank's or I'd run you home."

"That's all right," I says, trotting along beside him. "I'd rather walk. I'm reducing!"

"Good girl, keep full of health!" says he approvingly. "For you are going to need it. Tell me, little Bonnie, have you heard anything from Silvermount today?"

"Yes!" I gasped. "He asked me to come to the office after lunch."

"Hum!" says Nicky, putting on his lion expression. "I thought likely. Made any agreement with him?"

"No," I says, so full of grief I couldn't even go into details.

"I am going to ask something of you, Bonnie," he says, seriously after a little wait, during which we reached the corner of Hollywood Boulevard. "I am going to suggest that no matter what kind of an offer Silvermount makes you this afternoon, you won't close with him until after you have seen me. What time is your appointment?"

"Two-thirty," I says. "But I don't believe he will offer me anything except the air."

"Oh, he'll make a proposition of some kind," says Nicky, still like a lion. "But stall him off until tomorrow. Then when you leave his office, beat it right on up to my bungalow, will you? And bring your mother."

"Sure!" I says, bewildered.

"One more thing," says he. "Just don't mention me to Benny, please."

"All right, Nicky," I says. "So long."

And then he crossed over and joined a bunch of men in front of Frank's place, and I, hugging my doll,

skipped on down to Vine Street to ask mommer what was what.

At 2:30 prompt that afternoon, I having received not alone my chicken sandwich and etc. but a good bawling out from Adele for being such a boob, we both turned up at Mr. Silvermount's office. I was that paralyzed over what I had done I couldn't of possibly spoke, even to announce myself. But fortunately mommer was not the type that is easily let out, and so she says "Mr. Silvermount, by appointment" to the girl in the outer office, with all the manner in the world. The girl got through typing what she was typing, wrote our name on a form, and says "Be seated," so we were, while she opened a big carved teakwood door into the temple, and by and by come out and says Mr. Silvermount would see us in a few minutes.

Well, believe me, if them few minutes didn't seem as long as any spent in a dentist office! People came and went, carrying papers and hustling, very busy. Finally a tall thin man come out with a big cigar, biting on it. He went into the room opposite and slammed the door. Then the girl at the desk got up and opened the teakwood for us.

"All right!" she says, and I'll bet from her cheerfulness she used to work for a dentist, at that. "All right, Mr. Silvermount will see you now."

In we went, mommer sailing right ahead like a full-blown ship. Mr. Silvermount was sitting at the far end of a enormous plush office, behind a big shiny desk with everything on it but work, so I suppose he had it there as a kind of fortress. Anyway it was awful large

and heavy, with a space under it where he could seek the protecting company of the wastebasket in extreme cases. When he caught sight of mommer I thought at first he was going down to see was the wastebasket really there, but changed his mind and wiggled his cigar at us fiercely, instead.

"Sit down, sit down," he says with his thumbs. "Have a chair, do!"

"Thank you," says I. "This is mommer, Mr. Silvermount."

"So I guessed!" says he. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Delane. Well, I suppose it is you will do the talking, eh?"

"Not at all, dear Mr. Silvermount," says mommer smoothly. "I guess we can leave that to you. I just come along to keep my little girl company. My daughter is so young, Mr. Silvermount, only sixteen, and I never leave her go anywheres alone. And so talented, Mr. Silvermount, too. Why, when she was a child, her professors used to say to me——"

"That's all right, what they said, Mrs. Delane," says Big Benny, waving my past to one side like it had been cigar smoke—which was about what it was. "What they said don't interest me any," he says. "Beside which, she can say plenty for herself. You should of heard her on the phone this morning!"

Well, I turned black and white at that, I guess, but I needn't of, because all of a sudden Mr. Silvermount slapped the desk and broke out laughing so hard he had to take the cigar out of his mouth.

"Mrs. Delane, your—er—daughter sassed me some-

thing awful!" he says as soon as he could speak again. "It was the first time anyone outside of my wife has spoke to me nachural in years! I thought I would die laffing. Oy! Ain't we got fun?"

"Sweet daddy!" I says. "I didn't mean—honest, Mr. Silvermount——"

"Don't you worry!" he says. "I like a girl who can stand on her own feet. Now listen. I got you here because I might consider making you an offer. Mind, I don't want you to get any nonsense in the head about you're a wonder, or anything. But I seen the work you done in *The Mischief Maker*, *Miss Delane*, and I think with time and hard work we can make an actress out of you!"

Believe me, I sat on the edge of my seat then, all ready to jump at anything he should say. But mommer held me back with a look.

"Now, I am prepared to sign Bonnie up," Silvermount went on, "for a five-year contract at the same salary she's been getting for this last picture. And what is more, I will feature her in a new line of comedies. She'll get paid only when working, of course. But I'll write into the agreement that she is to make not less than five pictures a year."

Well, even now I can hardly imagine my own feelings when I heard this. Five years! With the great Silvermount! Featured! Why, it was too good to be true! Then I remembered my promise to Nicky, and nearly give a groan aloud. Suppose I held out and then for some reason Mr. Silvermount changed his

mind and I lost this wonderful chance? Mommer, however, never turned a eyelash, but rushed right at him.

"Oh, no, Mr. Silvermount, that would never do!" she says very glib. "I'm afraid you don't appreciate my little girl's value. A clever comedienne is the rarest thing in fillums, and she is it. We don't need money, really, and can afford to wait until we get just the right opening."

"Well, we'll say full salary fifty-two weeks a year, whether she is working or not," says Silver Benny, chewing the cigar again. "How's that?"

"Well," says mommer, "that's better. But all it really means, Mr. Silvermount, is that if you are paying her you will see to it that she is working. How about one twenty-five a week, full time?"

"No, Mrs. Delane," he says, "I reached my limit. It ain't like your daughter was a well-known star we are bidding for. We will make her, consider that! At the end of five years she will be some place, what with the training and experience she will get. I don't mind telling you, I think she has got a big future if she will work."

"I see you think she will be good for five years, anyways," says mommer dryly, getting up and holding out her hand. "Well, Mr. Silvermount, I am going to ask for tonight to think this over. Will that be all right? I don't want to rush Bonnie into anything. I never did, even when she was a darling little baby!"

"Very well, I'll hear from you in the morning then,"

says Silvermount, opening the door to let us out. "I think you had better say yes, Miss Bonnie. A girl don't get a chance like this every day."

I could only nod and smile like a dumb-bell as we was shown out, but once on the street I found my voice and let Adele have it.

"What was you so upstage for?" I cried. "Suppose he changes his mind? What if he gets mad because we put him off. Oh, mommer, I am afraid—we—you—have made a awful mistake!"

"Shut up, dearie!" says Adele, walking briskly but patting my arm as she drew it through hers. "Just you shut up and leave me run this. It's my business and I know what I'm about. Why do you suppose he wants to tie you up on a five-year contract, unless he thinks you are one of the biggest discoveries in years? He knows well enough that in two years you are going to have Trixie Trueman wiped off the silver-sheet and will be worth ten times the contract he'd have you tied up on! Then his sending for you instead of waiting until you come around begging for work! It all points to the one thing, dearie. You are started for the big time, and you'll land there quick."

Of course I could see there was sense in what she said, and had to admit as much, but felt kind of shaky about it too.

"I wonder what this Nickolls has got up his sleeve," says mommer as we climbed the hilly street towards his bungalow. "Well, we will soon know."

Nicky's house stood on one of them little ridges of streets that cling like shelves to the Hollywood moun-

tains, and end because they just naturally can't climb any higher, and from the brick terrace the view of the city was like fairyland. The tall pepper trees on the sidewalk of the street below brushed this terrace with their tops. It was like being in a bird's nest. You could see for miles and miles, the pink and white and green of the big town, the black spikes of distant oil wells, the purple and blue mountains rolling along towards the sea.

The bungalow was Spanish. Very simple, of concrete, with a red tiled roof and long windows, and a minute after we rang, Nicky himself opened a door directly into the great enormous room that was practically the whole house. A room as big and simple and ruggedly beautiful as himself. There was a open fireplace at one end and a open grand piano at the other, and a big blue tapestry with a heathen god of some kind embroidered on it, hanging from the iron railing of the stairs which led right up out of this strange room.

"Hello, girls!" says Nicky. "Come right in. I have had my Jap make iced tea—much against his principles—and it's just ready! Sit down and be comfortable. These are good cigarettes. Now tell me, what did the old boy say, anyhow?"

We told him. At least mommer did, and he listened in silence, nodding now and then, or shaking his head in that lion way of his. And he let her get absolutely all through before he spoke.

"Have some more tea?" he says then. "No? Then let us talk about me for a moment. You must have

wondered why I wanted to see you up here. Well, it is because I am leaving Silvermount!"

Some jolt, that! Why, Nicky leaving Silvermount was hard to grasp. He was part of them. He had been there for years. He was their best man and they told the world he was. He smiled a little when he saw our faces at his announcement.

"I'm not leaving Benny for another company," he says. "I'm going to make and produce my own pictures. I've been wanting to do this for a long time, and I've held out, waiting for just one thing. Now I have found it, and I am going ahead."

Nicky come over close and drew up a little leather-covered stool and sat on it, hitching himself over to us confidential and earnest.

"I want to explain the whole situation to you," he says, "but first I want to say something in Benny's favor. The Silvermount practically controls the motion-picture industry today. It is, morally if not actually, a trust. They are the top of the wave, and if you sign with them you will be in with the big-time people, and in pretty fairly right. He is not offering you enough money for what he evidently considers you are worth, but if you sign with him you will get your money. At least it will be as certain as anything in pictures, and I want to be sure you understand what a good thing that is before I go any further. Do you?"

"Yes, Nicky!" I says breathlessly, because I could feel something big was coming. "Go on and talk, Nicky!"

"What I am going to do is this," says he. "I am going to see if it is not possible to make good pictures, and make 'em clean, with a thoroughly honest force. Joe, that splendid camera man, is coming with me, and so is Louie, and I know where I can get one or two others. I'll rent space in the Bunton Studios and work cheap. You have heard me holler about how playing preferences has dry-rotted Silvermount? Well, there'll be none of that stuff on my lot! I don't want anybody with me who doesn't understand that thoroughly. There will be no grafts and no favorites!"

"Good!" says mommer. "When will the funeral be, and do we omit flowers?"

Nicky laughed. "Why?" says he.

"I thought you was talking about going to heaven," says mommer.

"It's more likely to be hell," says Nicky with a snort. "But I'll get a clean organization if I have to raise just that to get it! I know my business, and I'm only going to hire people who know theirs."

He got up again and commenced pacing up and down the long room, clasping and unclasping his hands nervously.

"Now we come to the point," he says. "I own three scripts by Greyton, the chap who wrote *The Mischief Maker*. I bought them long ago, before the Silvermount people could see him at all. They are all first-class comedy material suitable for superfeatures. And the only thing I have been waiting for is the right star."

He stopped in front of me and smiled that sweet

smile of his that would win a heart of stone. But there was nothing slick in his eyes.

"I have capital enough right now to make one picture," says he. "And the promise of more. Say, little Bonnie, Ben told you one lie today, and that was when he said he'd make a real actress out of you. You are a real actress. You are that strange, unaccountable thing, a genius. I'm willing to gamble my entire stake on it. In other words, I'll give you five hundred a week, sign you for all three pictures at an increase of a hundred a week with each successive picture we make. It's not a fortune as pictures go; but it is all I can honestly offer you."

"Oh!" I says, getting to my feet like a person in a dream.

"Little Bonnie," he says, taking my hands, "those stories might have been written for you. And I'm going to star you in them if you'll stick by me!"

"Nicky, Nicky!" I says. "Don't think I'm kidding, but star or no star, you made me, Nicky, and I'd stick if it was the biggest gamble in the picture game!"

CHAPTER XVIII

A PERSON'S not knowing what experience lies just ahead of them is one of the greatest inconveniences of life. Take for a sample a boy I know of who got ruined by a saxophone. You see this boy, he was awful anxious to get into the pictures and had made friends with another boy named Eddie, who knew a producer real well. Eddie was going to introduce our hero to this producer sometime, but in the meanwhile our friend borrowed a saxophone from him. Well, this Eddie went away on a trip, and our hero thought, well, I believe I will high-finance a saxophone of my own. So he hocked Eddie's saxophone and with part of the money, he paid the first installment on one of his own. He was just learning to play real good, because as he was not working he had plenty of time to practice, when he heard that Eddie had returned sooner than expected. Well, Eddie naturally wanted his saxophone back, so our hero, being broke, had to hock his installment saxophone in order to get his friend's out. Which he done.

The only trouble was that when the installment collector come around there wasn't any installment to pay him with, and when he says why then I will take the instrument, our hero had nothing only a pawn ticket, so the installment man had him put in the cooler. And

this day that he went to the cooler happened to be the very day Eddie had it all fixed up for him to meet the producer. Well, he learned to play the saxophone, anyways.

Now when I signed up with Nicky to star at five hundred a week the world was my saxophone, so to speak, and it looked like I was going to have lots of chance to learn to play it.

"This is like it!" says mommer. "What a good thing we didn't close with Silvermount. They say a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, but I always say, not if you can kill the two birds with one stone!"

"Well, now that we are rich," I says, "there is one thing I am going to holler about. No more Mrs. Snifter in our lifes, and, oh sweet daddy; won't I weep at parting from her, just!"

"It's a real cheap, comfortable little place," says mommer doubtfully. "And we could save against the rainy season."

"Say, listen, mommer dear," I says. "This is only April, and what with my contract, the rainy season can't possibly start for five months. What is more, earning the big money which I now am, I feel entitled to get a little fun out of it. Of course I don't intend to lose my head, but I do think we ought to buy a house on time, and also a car on the installment plan. Nothing much, you know. Say an eighteen-room Spanish home and a nice little roadster. I don't care for anything over twelve cylinders for a start."

"Why, dearie!" says mommer. "After all you said about economy!"

"But, mommer, after we start the next picture I will be getting even more!" I explained reasonably. "And when we come to renew the contract, why you know yourself, I will be able to ask for practically anything I want. Hitch your wagon to a star, I say."

"Well, you know that piece commencing 'Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder where you are,'"

says mommer. "When I was Laura's mother I always used to tell her you can afford to live simple if you got money in the savings bank."

"Did she act on it?" says I.

"Well, no," says Adele.

And after that nothing mommer said could stop me from getting us a few things. She just didn't seem to realize there would be plenty more where this week's pay came from, and so why not enjoy life while a person had it? Especially after all the grief we'd been through. And so I set out to grab off a few of this world's best, wondering a little if I would be able to convince the ones I was about to deal with that I was really a star. I even put my contract into my bag when I went looking for my house, thinking maybe it would be necessary to flash it. But not at all. Nicky's announcements had evidently forestalled any more private personal ones of my own, and the very first real-estate office I went in, the man there knew more about me than I did.

"Sure, I know you, Miss Delane," says the bird. "I seen your picture in the paper this morning!"

Whatter you know! Of course I hated to hear this, and it offended my ears like sweet music or something!

My map in the news sheets, and a recognizable picture, at that! Also the real-estate folks treated me with a respect which was all news to me. Up to then I had a idea that if a person was in the pictures every California native son or daughter, or even naturalized Iowaian, would consider the fact sufficient grounds for insulting and mistrusting me. However, it seems I had a crooked slant on that subject. Insults was for would-bes, extras and small fry generally. But once let a actress be a star, and sweet daddy, how the flowers did bloom! It was Miss Delane allow me! Would this suit you, Miss Delane, or would you like something better made to order? Let me charge it, Miss Delane, let me send it, let me carry it, let me this, let me that, until I felt like a cross between the queen of Spain and the Statue of Liberty.

Every place I'd go it was the same. The clerk at the Laurelwood was the only person I couldn't impress, and I guess he was calloused from rubbing up against celebrities for so long.

"Well, well, if it isn't Miss Delane!" says he lightly when I dropped by there to see did I have any mail. He had known me as McFadden of course, but nothing got by that bird. "Well, well! Working for the pictures, I see!"

However, to get a rise out of a hotel clerk was really too much to expect, and the rest of the world made the loss up to me, I'll say it did!

The home I finally decided on was not after all a mansion, but the cutest little bungalow imaginable, and I got it close both to Santa Monica Boulevard and the

price I was prepared for. I had decided it must be thoroughly modern in every way, and so selected an old Spanish model from a street where a hundred new assorted homes was on the market all at once, most of them finished, or pretty nearly ready to move into, but in spite of that, quite a selection remaining as yet unsold.

I had a awful time making up my mind between a Italian villa with blue doors and windows and a red roof; a cute little Greek temple, all snow-white with bouquets of flowers done in colored tiles let into the plaster on the outside walls; a light green Early English cottage with black and white cross beams and a roof of some kind of patent shingles that, honest, looked pretty nearly like a thatch; and a warm rose-pink stucco Spanish one, with carved redwood window frames, tiled roof and a tiny patio and colonnade where the sweetest assortment of cactus was already set out, just like Ramona's house or something.

They was all on the same block and I finally fell for the Spanish, paid down a coupla dollars to bind the bargain, and then mommer and me went to furnishing, and here is where I had trouble with mommer right away, because she had set ideas about gilded eucalyptus leaves in the fireplaces, kewpie dolls in the bookcases, and she would keep taking the colored plaster art book ends I had picked up down to a art-gift shop, and putting one at each end of the mantel for ornaments.

"Say listen, mommer dear," I says, "I been raised on the best magazines in the country and I know what is what in interior decoration, and this isn't. I want

our home should be refined in every particular, and in thoroughly good taste. So if you don't mind, just lay off, will you, until Baumburger's Home Decoration Department gets here."

"How do you know they will make a artistic job of it?" says mommer.

"Well, they ought to," I says. "They been furnishing Spanish-style houses complete ever since Mission furniture went cold. Besides, there is a regular formula for Southern California houses in good taste, and once you know it you can't go wrong. Take one refractory table, three shopworn altar cloths, one pair polly-chromo candlesticks, one black velvet rug, four of the most uncomfortable wooden carved chairs you can find, spread thinly about a room with no wall paper over the plaster, and there you are! Perfect Inquisition Period room!"

"Bah!" says mommer. "Piffle!"

But she didn't argue any beyond that, not even when I had Casa Delane engraved on the iron door knocker, although I seen her look at it hard for a long while and then register "Cuckoo! Perfectly, absolutely cuckoo!" as she went away.

But my buying the car was even worse. Mommer was all for a flivver, not alone because she could run one of them herself but on the expense account again.

"Why, Bonnie dearie!" she says to me. "Don't think I am trying to prevent you from spending your own money. I know there's precious little use in me trying to do that! But think what them cars can do! Why, I know a man used his for climbing trees, or so

he claimed. And they say that you get sixty miles to the gallon, and a pair of shoes last four years."

"Well, the kind of car I'm going to get," I says firmly, "would take a gallon sixty miles a minute if I was in the bootlegging business, and as for shoes, the only shoes that ever lasted me four years was a pair of pink knitted bedroom slippers my old chum Ella give me for Christmas one year, and the reason they wore so good is because I never put them on. No, mommer dear, if there is one thing a successful picture actress is known for it is her car. And the one I am going to have will be a humdinger!"

I had made up my mind that my car should be in every way distinguished and handsome, and believe me it took some shopping to find exactly what I wanted—a boat that was both refined and individual and still in good taste, yet unmistakably expensive. But at last I settled on a Alpine twin-six.

Well, this car was sure some boat. It was painted snow-white with solid brass disk wheels and crimson genuine morocco leather upholstery, and it had the cutest, most complete equipment I ever seen, from a solid silver eight-day clock to ash trays, cigarette lighter, cigarette box, vanity case, a place to keep my veils, and a horn like the Angel Gabriel. It was real practical, too, for it had a double windshield to keep the persons in the back seat from hearing what the two on the front seat said.

I believe it also had a engine of some kind, because the lovely talker who sold me it lifted up the hood and gabbled about it quite a lot, but all I come away

with was the general idea that the bus had a head-involved engine, double irritation, four speeds and one standstill, or something of the kind.

Well, when I had bought this bus, and paid the first installment on it, I kind of went easy about what else I let myself in for, and got very little more. Of course the furniture in the house, including an electric piano, was on time, and so I merely bought myself a wrist watch with only quite small diamonds in it, and one good-looking ring to wear on my contract-signing hand. You maybe have noticed that if the hand which stretches out the old self-filler to make its mark on the sign-here line wears a diamond, the papers are generally made out accordingly. Anyways, I got me these bare necessities, and then I quit, except for a few charge accounts here and there.

Meanwhile of course I was not spending all my time in the stores. Nicky had rented space on the Brunton lot, right near Pickford, and we was, during odd moments, making our first picture. The name of it was Alias Cinderella, who was me, and it was a scream, some of it modern and some of it taking place back in Middling Evil times in Merry England, and right away Nicky was in trouble, just like an old-time producer, on account of a unprecedented thing happening. The extras struck.

Of course they was not common extras, but a bunch of cow-punchers. In the pictures practically all riding scenes are done by punchers in various costumes, and in the big mob scene in Cinderella the punchers Nicky had hired was dressed up in winter-weight suits of

armor, with helmets and all, and the trouble come out of the fact of the armor being so heavy that for the first time in their lives these punchers couldn't get on their horses without being helped, and they took it as a personal insult from Nicky.

Well, while Nicky was straightening this fight out I had time to get my dressing room at the studio fixed, and believe me, I had some shack. The system was different over here, and the stars each had a bungalow to themselves, and I was no exception. A modest young couple could of gone housekeeping in mine real comfortable, for I had a sitting room with a fireplace in it, a rest room with a bed, a big dressing room and bath, and the cutest kitchenette ever, where mommer would fix up lunch every day for Nicky and her and me and usually Greg Strickland, and often as not one or two others, including Slim Rolf, who was now our publicity director, and my old friend from Stoneybrook, Bert Green.

It was over Bert that I and Nicky had our first and only fight because a promise is a promise and I had made one to Bert and was going to keep it at any price. So as soon as Nicky had hired his space I wrote home to Bert.

"Dear Bert," I wrote. "Well, here I am a star, and I want you to take the first train out here and be still-camera man with this concern. Dear old Bert, I will sure be glad to see you, this is no joke, Bert, but a real offer and I will see that you get the right sort of money. So come at once, but please do not tell pop one thing about me but inclosed find fifty dollars

(\$50) which you might lend him from yourself, see, because I know he needs it, but do not tell him you heard from me or where I am."

Well, when I had posted this letter and couldn't get it back, I went and broke the news to Nicky, and right then we had this row I am telling you about.

"Didn't I tell you I was not going to have any of that sort of thing on this lot?" Nicky shouted at me. "Didn't you agree to it? That's what ruins the picture business. It's a damn outrage, and I won't stand for it!"

"All right, go ahead and fire me!" I says. "But Bert will make good, and a promise is a promise. If you don't want me any more, just say so, and I can go back to Silvermount. Especially after the morning's papers."

Well, that was true enough. Because The Mischief Maker had been released in New York the week before and it had turned out to be a ten-strike with fully nine of the strikes in my favor. Heaven knows I hadn't meant to do Trixie Trueman any dirt after all her kind generosity to me, but then, I couldn't very well do myself a mean trick either, and I had acted the very best I knew how in the piece. So when it come out that I had walked away with the picture, why it was not really my fault if I was so good. All the papers without exception had said I was a wonderful actress and had a great future, and my mail was swamped with letters not alone from milliners, and so forth, but agencies and a couple of casting directors, and so naturally I felt I could stand on my own feet

and that the shoe was on the other foot, and so forth. But for all that I couldn't scare Nicky or make him back down for one minute, even.

"All right!" says he grimly. "Go on. I'll let you out if you wish. Because I won't have anybody on my lot who isn't contented."

"Oh, Nicky, I don't really want to go!" I says weakly. "And if Bert ain't the best still-photographer at the Brunton you can fire the both of us. I wouldn't wish a clown on to you, Nicky, you ought to know that!"

"Augh!" he grunted, still mad, and walked away.

But when Bert showed up, long nose, black ribband and nervous eyeglasses, all just the same as ever, Nicky come around to thinking the same as I did, and soon we was all friends again.

Things was different about Strick, although it was not me hired him, but John Austin Nickolls his own self. Strick had been pretty good in *The Mischief Maker*, and this prince-charming part suited him first-rate. So Nicky signed him up quite uninfluenced by me, because all I had said to him was that Strick fed me well, and that he would be perfectly cast in the part, and that everybody else Nicky suggested made me nervous and I didn't know could I play opposite them, and a few little things like that. Nicky listened while I pulled this line, smiling his sweet smile, and honest, a person would of thought I was a puppy he was having a lot of patience with, or something, the way he waited until I got all through, just merely shaking his lion's mane indulgently now and then.

"I don't like that boy," says he at last. "I think he's a bad actor."

"Oh, no, Nicky!" I says. "He's a wonderful actor, really, and he has a great future!"

"You know what I mean perfectly well," says Nicky. "He can act adequately, and I'm going to hire him because he looks the part and has good legs. But he's a hard-boiled ham and a pup and I don't like him. He offends me. So does the smell of developing fluid, and I have to use both in this business. But I trust you will admit I don't have to like 'em—eh?"

Well, naturally, I didn't make any remarks about that. I couldn't, somehow, because I liked Nicky, and although fond of Strick I couldn't prove that he was any saint. However, he was to be my leading juvenile, so I should worry!

It ain't often that a person finds heaven on earth, but these weeks of making Cinderella come pretty near to being that, and I sure had a wonderful time, flying all over the country in my big white car, Stricky driving it for me practically every day, and on Sundays going with him and mommer and dear old Bert down to Riverside Inn for lunch, or the four of us loafing away the day at the beach under bright umbrellas, wearing just our bathing suits, meeting everybody in the motion-picture world, and having a big time generally.

Week days was different, though, and partially through mommer's influence, but mostly of my own accord, there was no night life for me. Day after day I would work hard as I knew how for Nicky and his

stake in me, but principally for my own art, and was never so happy as then. Often of a evening I would come back to the studio after dinner and sit in with my director while we worked the technical force overtime, running the rushes over and over, cutting titling and criticizing. Sometimes we would stay on until eleven o'clock or later, and go home dead but happy, growing daily more sure that we was making one of the finest special features that had ever been turned out. It was hard, and at times awful discouraging, what with difficulties coming up and so forth. But in the main the stuff was good. We was always sure of that, especially one scene where I held up a burglar with a revolver.

"Say, listen, Nicky," I says one evening. "I wouldn't be surprised if some night I had to play that same scene at home. There's been a lot of burglaries out in our district lately, and I even heard one of the girls was held up in her car and had her diamonds taken away from her!"

"Practically obliged to go home in a barrel, I suppose," says Nicky. "Better get yourself a gun, little Bonnie. It's not a bad idea for two women alone in a house to have one handy, especially way out in those new developments."

"I think I'll just take the one I'm using in the picture home to-night," I says, "and borrow it until I can think to buy one."

"That's a good hunch," says Nicky. "Take it along. It happens to be my own, and you are welcome to it."

Well, I felt a lot easier at night after that, and if

any burglar was one-half as scared of that gun as I was, well, they would let our house alone, that was a cinch! Stricky also had been worried over me being alone in the house with only mommer, and he was relieved when I told him about it one Sunday afternoon. We was going out to the beach together, so naturally I didn't take it, but showed him where I had it parked in the drawer of a Early Spanish kitchen cabinet we had in our parlor.

"Gee, that's a pretty gun," says he. "Look at that inlay, will you! Say, listen, Bonnie, is it practical?"

"Sure," I says. "Didn't you see me shooting blanks with it at old Joe in the burglar sequence?"

"This the same one?" says Strick as I put it away in the drawer again. "Funny I didn't notice it at the studio; it is certainly some gun! I wish it was mine."

Well, of course I would have given it to him if I had owned it, because the way I felt towards Stricky by now, he could of had anything I owned just for the asking, including myself. But he wasn't the marrying kind, I knew that, while hoping all the time that he would change. And although he certainly was sweet with me, and come around a lot and ate practically every meal at our house, and I went everywheres with him, not a murmur about wedding bells had come from him so far. You know how it is. If you like a person awful well and can't keep from showing it, the chances are they will like you all the less; the faster you advance the faster they retreat, and I was getting so dizzy with loving him that I couldn't see straight any more when he was around. The situation was rapidly get-

ting Adele's goat, and she used to hang a lot of crape about it.

"Why, Bonnie dearie, I can't imagine what you see in him," she says. "That is, outside of his good looks. I think that some day you will be sorry you know him. Act with him if you must, but off the lot for heaven's sake lay off him! Or mark my words, you will regret it. I been in the industry long enough to tell a bad young man when I see one, and I'm telling you!"

Well naturally, after the number of years she had been a mother to all them many daughters, mommer had ought to of known better than to spring a line of that kind on me, because like any other girl in love, the more dirt was peddled to me about Strick, why the stronger for him I got. He was such a pleasure to look at, and why everybody should pick on him was more than I could tell, and I was as jealous as a cat if he so much as looked at anybody else. And give him things? Say, I'd of given Stricky anything in the world except footage in the camera!

CHAPTER XIX

OF course when it come to holding the center of the lens I was as self-protective as any other going concern. And the author of the story, Mr. Harold Greyton, and me had considerably different views on the subject of what scenes I was to have, and how many. Nicky, thank the Lord, was with me, but between us Mr. Greyton had his hands full.

These Greytons, for they was two of them, man and wife, were at this time the only flies in my rice pudding. I was sitting on the top of the world crowing, but whenever either of them come on the lot I had to lay off. Not but that Mr. Greyton was always polite. He was, excepting of course when talking to Nicky about what Nicky was doing to his story. But as far as I personally was concerned Mr. Greyton had the manner of a regular duke. That was what got my goat.

For you see, up to the time the Greytons commenced overrunning our lot I thought I had a lot of class. Some dog I put on, and the very minute I come in contact with them people I see that I had been bulling myself. I was inferior in social manners, and in my heart I realized it. I had for a moment supposed that because I was a star I was on the topside of things, but now I seen I was wrong. There was in pictures a social layer that I hadn't even touched as yet—a class

which spoke like Boston, dressed like New York and lived like Philadelphia. The women, like Trixie and some other prominent stars I had seen, wore only a little powder and no other make-up when off the lot; they spoke quiet; their cars was dark and no snap to them, but only a sort of appearance that made my big white boat all wrong somehow. What these folks did outside of playing golf and riding horse-back, and maybe running a ranch back in the valley somewheres, I didn't know. I was missing something, I wasn't sure just what, but only that it was the real big-time performance and that it was going on behind closed doors. I might be a star, but I needed a lot of polishing up before I could shine properly among the gang the Greytons played with.

Of course I got a certain line on what to do, just from hearing the Greytons talk. They, and even some of the big stars, read books and everything. Well, I could do that, and play golf, as well, if that would help on my refinement. So I got me a coupla books and a golf suit of black and white checks with knickers, and a set of clubs in a real genuine cowhide bag. But owning that cowhide was the nearest I come to any browsing on the green grass for a while, on account of working so hard.

One thing that the big eggs was doing I could do, and that was to take a little of the course in diction that a young Harvard College boy was giving. He come to my Spanish Fandango one evening a week, and fed me the English language. It seems all the rich hams who had graduated to a butler and other high-

class discomforts of refined living was also taking these lessons from him under the name of dramatic expression, while what he was really doing was learning them to talk straight. But after two weeks I graduated of my own accord, and paid him for the course in full.

"I tell you what, buddy," I says to him, "I guess I have now learned enough accent to get me by during a introduction or a interview, or to enable me to floor any fresh female I may happen to run into, and that is all I need. Some day when I am less busy I may again try to pry off enough of a cure to keep me from having a relapse, but just now I got my art to think about."

You see, I knew that I would get to the top more on my work than anything else, and it was a healthy thing for me to realize in time I was not actually there yet by any means. And believe me, although climb as you may, there is always a higher place beyond, to any true artist. Meanwhile the Greytons continued to get my angora.

As I have mentioned, I and he had different ideas about the picture. There was a young boy's part in it that had some good sequences, and I couldn't see why they should not be turned over to me. But it seems Mr Greyton could see several million reasons why not, without even looking. Finally I went to Nicky about it, and Nicky just threw his hands in the air the very minute I started my line of argument.

"Authors!" he roared like a lion. "Don't talk to me about authors! What does he know about a screen version of his story? Nothing, absolutely nothing!

But can you make him believe that? I should say not! I've bought this story, and I'll do what I damn please with it!"

"So you think I'm right, don't you, Nicky?" I says.

"Of course you are right!" he says. "What we are doing is putting a little pep and punch into his script. We've even had to change the plot. Say, the only plot that chap has is in the cemetery! And yet he yaps around here all day about 'my story, my beautiful story.' By heaven, when he sees this picture finished he won't know he had anything to do with it. He won't even recognize it! And if we made it like his stuff the theater would be empty before the end of the second reel!"

"What can you do about it, Nicky?" I says. "Can't you chain him up or something? He's got us worried nearly to death sticking around the set all the time."

"Don't tell me!" says Nicky. "I've noticed that quite plainly."

He got thoughtful for a moment, scratching his curls in that funny way he had.

"I've got it!" he says at last. "I'll give him an office! One with a desk in it and a big chair. Then he'll think he has to stay there or lose his dignity, and he can sit in it from now to Kingdom Come, keeping the furniture from running away, and otherwise elevating the motion pictures. That'll cage him!"

And Mr. Author Greyton fell for it, too, just like Nicky had predicted. We gave him a little room in one of the main buildings, hitched a typewriter in it, a roll-top desk, and a roll-back chair, and pretty nearly

any time we passed the window we could see the author inside, using his desk for all it was worth. By which I mean to say his feet was on it, and he would be hard at work reading the sporting page of some newspaper. But it kept him off the lot.

Well, struggling with authors and other trials, we still managed to get in considerable work, making a million-dollar production for less than three hundred thousand dollars, or so it seemed around the fourth week. We was all rejoicing at how good it looked. Taking things by and large, they was about as large as anybody could desire. And then, like a delicious desert at the end of a grand meal, I woke up one morning like Lord Byron, to find my pictures plastered all over Los Angeles and neighborhood. The Mischief Maker was to have its California opening at Grauman's, and in spite of all mention to the contrary my name was on the sheets. The paper read like this:

THE MISCHIEF MAKER
FEATURING
TRIXIE TRUEMAN, GREGORY STRICKLAND
BONNIE DELANE
AND
THE FAMOUS SILVERMOUNT COLLIB
FLUFF
IF IT'S A SUPER-PRODUCTION, IT'S A
SILVERMOUNT

And there was me in every poster. And these posters sure was original, for the main one showed

me with tangled curls and the bucket of suds, not beer but the kind that goes down the sink; my floor mop, my solemn admiring face turned sort of worshipping on Trixie in her grand furs, and Stricky standing by, slapping his riding breeches with a riding whip.

I saw the first one when mommer asked me early in the morning would I please run down to the nearest market and get some butter for breakfast, she had forgot to? And I had not wanted to go, but got out the bus and went because mommer had a way of being obeyed. And when I parked on Hollywood Boulevard there was a board fence next to the market, and here this fence was absolutely covered with me! Well, how long I stayed parked there, heaven only knows, but it's a wonder a cop didn't get after me. I just sat and looked at myself and looked and looked. Anybody would of thought they was no mirrors at home. And no regular art gallery ever gave me the kick that open-air Hollywood one did.

Of course I even then knew them posters was not real art, because I had seen postals of the Sistine Madonna and the Broken Pitcher and Rheims Cathedral and so forth, pop having carried quite a line of them at Christmas time. And besides, these posters was interesting, which of course let them out of the art class. But art or none, sweet daddy, they looked good to me!

Well, I rushed right home when I come out of my trance, but without the butter.

"Mommer!" I shouted. "I'm going to be at Grauman's, and they got me featured!"

Well, mommer came out of the electric kitchen, which

we had done perfect in the Late Los Angelean period because mommer refused to stand for anything antique in that direction; well, she came out of it with a bungalow apron on over her rich street clothes, and her cap over her perfectly waved hair, her face all glad and excited over my news.

"My Lord, ain't that grand!" she says. "Bonnie dearie, we will of course have to give a big theater party the opening night!"

Well, mommer knew the correct social ropes, so I not in the least reluctantly consented, and we sure did have some party! Nicky asked the crowd over to his bungalow at six o'clock for sandwiches and cocktails, because it is really better form to see the first show, which starts at seven, and eat afterwards.

There was Stricky and mommer and me and Bert and several others especially interested, including Mr. and Mrs. Greyton, all of us of course in full evening clothes and all our jewels. And when a little later we stood in line out on the sidewalk while Nicky bought a couple of yards of tickets I sure was proud of our appearance. And once inside, in our lounge, I kept on being proud, for even in that magnificent-looking bunch of people we stood out.

They say that in the old days the Metropolitan Opera House, New York City, on an opening night had the finest display of jewelry and dresses of any place in the country. Now of course the opening night of a big feature fillum has that out-of-date opera stuff backed off the map. Picture people have jewels that really amount to something, and of course dressing is

with them a part of their profession. I felt sure that there had never been anything like the display at Grauman's, pulled off at the little old Metropolitan. And when I asked Mr. Greyton, who is a New Yorker, if that was the case, he says why certainly there was never anything like it at any opera he ever saw.

Well, sweet daddy, here I was not alone sitting in at one of the big social features, but featured at it! Pretty poor, I'll say not! And the picture went over big, those in the audience clapping when their friends showed on the screen, the same as the first entrance in a speaking theater, but in as intimate a tone as the home folks greeting friend daughter's appearance on a Stonybrook Dramatic Club night. I hardly knew where I was, it was like a dream or something with Bert sitting one side of me, his glasses falling off his nose and saying, "Immense! Immense!" just like the old days except for perfect evening clothes, and on my other side Mr. Greyton murmuring some polite dope once in a while. And then during the intermission I caught sight of Mr. Silvermount himself in a loge across the way.

He had Trixie and Anita with him and a couple of johns, and for a minute I didn't know would he bow or not. But he did, and not alone bowed but waved and smiled as well. Not so Trixie, but what could a person expect? I was all set for her to look the other way, because every time I had telephoned her lately she had been out, even when she answered the phone herself.

How Benny Silvermount would act had been doubt-

ful up to then. Not that he especially cared about me, or so I then supposed, but everybody was talking of how hard he had taken Nickolls' leaving him, so I thought maybe I would be in very wrong, too, on account of being with Nicky. But evidently I was on bowing terms, and so I bowed and smiled back, and folks in the audience looked, and some recognized me and there was actually a little clapping, but I couldn't of got up and bowed like mommer wanted me, to save my life.

Well, the picture going over so big, we made a celebration of it, getting over to Marcel's to dinner about quarter to ten o'clock, and dancing until closing, and when I got home I thought thank Gawd I do not have to work to-morrow. Nicky will be making mob scenes and I can sleep, and so fell into bed to dream, but never dreaming of what would happen next day.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN I woke up it was early afternoon, and mommer was standing by me with a cup of coffee and a bran biscuit, which hearty meal was all she ever let me have for breakfast.

"Sorry I have to wake you up, Bonnie dear," she says. "Sleep is so good for your face. But Mr. Silvermount telephoned he was running out to see you on important private business, and I think you better get up!"

"Benny Silvermount coming here!" I says. "What can he want!"

"I dunno!" says mommer. "But leave him come! They say you'd better be off with the old love before you're on with the new, but I always say, suppose you get off with the old, and then the new love don't come across?"

"Oh, mommer, how you talk!" I says. "I am going to stay with Nicky forever!"

But I scrambled out of the hay mighty pronto, just the same, and was barely ready by the time Big Ben parked his queer-looking foreign boat against our curb, and Benny, who was alone, jazzed our antique knocker.

"Mrs. Delane, I want to talk to Miss McFadden alone, if you please," he says as he come in.

"Oh, very well!" says mommer. "I am sure my

daugh-ter—— Well, if you will just excuse me, please, I got something to attend to upstairs!" And that is the nearest to floored I ever seen mommer. The minute the door was shut on her Benny come down to brass tacks. I could see he was dead serious.

"Look here Miss—Delane!" he says. "Are you stuck on Nickolls?"

"I am not!" I says. "But I don't see how it would be your affair, Mr. Silvermount, if I was!"

"Humph, that's good!" he says. "It makes things a whole lot simpler. How long are you tied up to him for?"

"Three pictures," I says.

"Too many!" says he. "Break your contract and come back to us. I'll give you double whatever he's paying you!"

Well, for a minute I thought he was cuckoo or something. But Benny Silvermount was the least cuckoo man in Hollywood, anybody knew that. His eyes was like steel gimlets, and I felt as if he could see my backbone. It sort of had me stopped, and for a minute I couldn't speak. Not so Benny.

"Look here, Miss Bonnie, I am a man of few words," he says. "I want you back. I'll pay to get you. The Mischief Maker will clean up a couple of million or I don't know this business. Silvermount Productions made that picture and made you. It is your duty to come back."

Well, that last brought me down to earth and I found my voice.

"No, Mr. Silvermount, you did not make that pic-

ture," I says. "John Austin Nickolls made it, and you know he did. You fought him tooth and nail and every step while he was shooting it too. You held him up on the money end, you didn't believe in it, and you said so, real free. The picture made me, all right, but it was Nicky made the picture and I'd never of been on the screen if it hadn't been for him, and I'll stick to him, you bet I will!"

"So I didn't make that picture—eh?" says Silvermount, never moving his sharp eyes from me.

"No!" I says hotly. "You peddled somebody else's brains, that's all!"

Silvermount got up and took his hat. Then he come and stood close to me.

"You are a good girl, Bonnie," he says, "but you're a fool. However, I will take you back any time. As for Nickolls——" And when he says Nickolls, Gee, how his map did change! It got suddenly wrinkled and ugly like a baboon, and the steel-blue lights in his eyes was like knives.

"Nickolls!" he shouted, all the rage that had evidently been slowly cooking for weeks bursting out of him. "I'll break the idiot! I'll wreck him so hard he won't never know what hit him! I made that feller, I tell you. Took him when he was a mere nothing, a young kid starving around town, glad to be assistant camera man at fifty a week! I trained him and saw he was a genius, gave him publicity, a big name—everything! And now look what he done to me. But I'll fix him for it! I could kill him with my hands for what he done. You watch out, and when the smash

comes you'll be glad to jump from under, and jump my way!"

"We can't fail!" I says. "This picture we are making is a great picture. It'll go over big. You can't stop it from succeeding, Mr. Silvermount!"

"Can't I stop it, though!" says he, still furious. "You just watch, that's all!"

And with them words he beat it out, slamming the door behind him, and for a few minutes I listened to the roar of the big foreign car as it rumbled off down the street. I was actually shaking with excitement and rage, and I guess maybe I was a little hysterical, too, for I got the cuckoo idea that Big Ben really meant what he had said about killing Nickolls. The idea, once in my bean, got my goat thoroughly, and by instinct I went over to the old dresser where I kept Nickolls' gun. He ought to have it back again. I pulled open the drawer. The gun was not there.

For a moment I thought I must of put it some place else, and then I remembered clearly how I had put it back last night my own self. Adele hadn't moved it, that was sure, she was too scared of the blame thing. There was only one other person knew I had it, and where I kept it. And as I stood leaning on the empty drawer and wondering, mommer's voice preceded her down the stairs.

"Is Mr. Silvermount gone?" she called. "Say, Bonnie, I forgot to tell you. While you was asleep this morning Stricky come over and ate breakfast with me. My! Won't he be surprised when he hears how Silvermount was here!"

CHAPTER XXI

I SUPPOSE it is the ambition of pretty near every honest working girl to have moving-picture magnates fighting over her; and to be in the position where she can spurn the gold of any producer, however humble, is pretty near enough to turn the head of a marble statue.

"But when I was Helen Murrell's mother," says mommer, talking my position over, "I used to try and keep her head down to normal so's she could buy her hats standard misses' size. They say pride comes before a fall, but I always say not unless you are a fall-guy in the first place. Bonnie dearie, keep your heart humble!"

Well, of course I loved mommer and all that. In fact I loved her so nearly like I would a real mother that I didn't pay the attention to her good advice I might of. I had by now got so used to her that she was a part of the family, so to speak, so naturally what she said to me was for the most part like rolling stones off a duck's back or something, what with things coming my way like they were. I don't mean Silvermount alone either, but presents, attentions and so forth, although of course Big Benny's offer was the subject of considerable conversation with us for a while.

"Bonnie, little Bonnie, I suppose some day I shall lose you!" says Nickolls, half laughing, half in earnest, when I had told him about it.

"Lose me?" I says. "How do you get that way? Not for any reason on earth! Say, Nicky, I'm nervous about Big Benny, though. He wouldn't actually try to hurt you, would he?"

"Benny?" says Nickolls, shaking his lion's head and roaring with laughter. "Say! That bird wouldn't strike a flea for fear of scratching his diamond rings on it!"

Well, that idea comforted me a lot and as time went along and nothing happened, why I kind of forgot just how rough my interview with Silvermount had been. Every day brought the Cinderella picture nearer its finish, and on the side I was swamped by all these invitations I am telling you about, including even one to dinner at the 'Greytons', which was a dry affair, more ways than one, and they actually played charades after. A person might as well of been back home in Stonybrook!

Of all the presents which perfect strangers commenced sending me for as a rule advertising purposes, but mutually so, the one which give me the biggest kick was not a case of homemade hootch of which Axel was the proud author, but a flock of real estate that was wished on me by a hot A-1 livewire real-estate development company. The goof which had this bright idea of giving me it had a mind trimmed with saxophones, a suit you could of played several kinds of games on, and other outward and visible signs of pep and enterprise. But there was nothing to laugh at in the deed he brought me.

The day he packed it around we was all seated at the luncheon table in my dressingroom bungalow over to the studio—Bert, mommer, Trixie, who was now suddenly speaking to me again since I was out of Silvermount for good and all, Axel, who had a heavy part in our picture, for he was driving the coach which dissolved into a pumpkin and back again, and we had a trained white rat doubling for him in the pumpkin footage. Well anyways, Axel was there, Stricky, of course, and one or two others, all crowded around the two-by-four table, having the usual picture actor's menu of cigarettes, black coffee and lettuce salad without oil, when in comes this bird Al Something and says the Arroyo del Rey Real Estate Company was opening up a new high-class residence district and with their compliments presented me with a lot in it. It seemed this development was out on the Someplace, and was certainly fast-growing because it already had one house and a real-estate office on it, which only left a thousand acres to be sold into hundred-foot lots, or bigger.

Well, at first of course we all thought this bird Al must be kidding, because out in Southern California a development of that or any other kind is liable to become a thriving city by the same month next year, and a piece of property in one is a real sure-enough present, no fooling! But no, he meant it, and the gift was not a ordinary lot, but a five acre ranch with a house on it.

"It's a cute little Mission-style two room bungalow,

Miss Delane," says this Al, "with old vines on it, and real old trees—must be eight or ten years old, some of those trees. And there is a fine little olive orchard planted to the one side of the house!"

"Good-land!" says mommer, seizing the deed to this property and smelling of it, and she come pretty near biting it, even, to make sure it was real. "What on earth does Bonnie have to do to get this, dear Mr. Al? My little daughter is so young—only sixteen—that I prefer to do all the talking for her!"

"She doesn't have to do a thing, not one thing, for it, Mrs. Delane," says this bird, which his name ought to of been Ernest. "The only idea is this: We would like to use her name as being the first one to buy out there, and the privilege to print her picture, see? And say that she intends to work the ranch herself, see? And allow us to get some pictures of her doing it, picking the fruit or something, see?"

"Say," says Rolfie, who was there too—"say, we could play that up fine, Bonnie. It's a new publicity line for us as well. You in overalls. Great stuff!"

"Immense, simply immense!" says Bert. "I will make some wonderful stills of her plucking her crop of olives. Immense!"

"Oh, dear, but when you get through taking those stills, which it's the truth you could make them better right here on the lot," says I, affecting languor, "what'll I do with the blame place, outside of paying taxes on it?"

"Now you hush, Bonnie dearie," says mommer hastily. "You never can tell but that a little place like

that may come in handy. Obey your mommer now, and take the deed."

So I reluctantly took it and then this Al, he took his hat and his departure, and a lucky thing for me, too, because even a talented actress like myself can only register an expression for just about so long, and I had pretty near run out of boredom before I finally reached for the papers and he for his Kelly. And then, sweet daddy, but I'll say we held some celebration when his back was turned, and shook hands with ourselves generally, especially Stricky, who kept telling me he had always known I would make good and so forth.

But it wasn't until a week later when we was through working, for the picture was finished and Nickolls was by then doing the final titling, that Stricky says to me he would drive me out and we would go and see my new property.

Ain't it a strange thing the way a perfect day comes to a person every once in a while for no particular reason, but is just a gift out of a clear heaven, so to speak? Often a person will get such a day when they least deserve it, and always when they least expect it. Sometimes I think God deliberately gives folks hours like that to keep them going. Not that I was having a hard life, or that I needed dispensations, but you get me. Fine as things was with me, there is always a fly in anybody's ointment, even if they have put it there themselves, and my fly was that I was not sure of Stricky's love for me. I never felt ever like I had him cinched, on account of him passing by all mention of getting married, and so forth. And this uncertain feel-

ing often made me unhappy, especially if I woke up and thought of it in the night.

But this day when Stricky drove me out in my car to the Arroyo del Rey Development, I did feel sure of him. Not that he proposed, but I just felt confident and serene. He was kind and sweet and acted awfully devoted, the day itself was extra fine even for California, the road a good one the whole ways, and we had one of them feathery, golden times as per see above. Even the property, when we at last got there, was a pleasant surprise.

The land had once been a big failure of a ranch. I guess it was located too near the water, or something, but anyways, the only trees that was any good were those around my house, which was as yet the only house there and it had evidently been the one the rancher failed in. It was sort of a failure itself, too, but it give me a grand feeling to own it, even after I had eat a ripe olive off the tree which is a mistake to do, for strangely enough they do not get the very necessary pickling until after they are removed from their native branches.

Well, after we had looked thorough at the house and the view, which view included the brand-new Spanish-type real estate office on the main four corners, why we climbed back into the bus and Stricky took me down to Riverside to a wonderful open-air hotel which was kept by a sort of Dago, I guess. At least I know Stricky says we was served by Al Fresco or something, but it was good eating, and we come back home after taking our time, kidding, laughing, and so on, and I

floating on air generally, perfectly gloriously happy when I reached the house and was seized upon by mommer.

"Good land, child," says she, "do you realize that this is Saturday night, and you are giving a dinner at the Ambassador? When do you think you are going to dress?"

"Right now!" I says, nearly knocked cuckoo, because I had entirely forgotten this party! And I was not alone giving it, but it was my first real important one, and Stricky had talked me into buying it as a celebration of the Cinderella picture being done.

"Say listen!" says Stricky, on our front step. "Do you mind if I don't call for you, but meet you at the hotel instead?"

"Why no!" says I. "It would be better, maybe. The table is in mommer's name. See you at 7:30."

"All right, so long!" says he. And I watched him swing away down the street, flecking his cane in that snappy way of his, my heart fairly following along after him, and mommer unable to drag me in while he remained in sight. If I had known what was to happen a few short hours later, would I have felt like that? Sweet daddy, I would not say so!

Well, as I am telling you, the first Nickolls super-production, *Alias Cinderella*, was now all made, and it was a bear. The photography was something grand, for Joe, our camera man, knew his work, and beside, Nicky had made him use one of these angora lenses that make everything long-haired-looking. It was the very latest in art-photography, without a doubt. The

building had all been a success, especially our million-dollar collapsible medieval castle set, which had actually cost three thousand dollars in money but good taste had raised the value like I said. The costumes was wonderful, and the direction the best that Nicky had done as yet, which all the trade admitted was going some.

When it come to acting, why it is difficult for me to say anything on account of how I do despise a star which thinks they are the whole cheese and takes all the credit. So I will merely pass along the remarks of others, which were universally to the effect that fine as the pictures was, it would of been nothing without me.

Everybody on our corner of the Brunton lot was perfectly contented with the result of our first effort, as were also all friends and relations and outsiders who had been sneaked in against the rules to see it. It was a haymaker, without a doubt, and there was no nervousness about whether the distributors would take it or not. All that remained was to show it to them, watch 'em drop dead, and when they recovered, accept their check and commence work on the next story.

Well, this being how things were, why naturally it seemed a good time for me to burst upon society with my initiation blowout as you might call it, and so I had invited all who had been good to me, but for Hollywood, it was not such a mixed crowd, at that.

Saturday night is Ambassador night on the Coast, as you undoubtedly know, and when I and mommer entered the great, glorious and gay cocoanut room in

plenty of time to receive our guests, it sure was some sight to behold. I was in the most wonderful mood and also a quiet little dress of peach-colored spangles and a green ostrich fan, very girlish and modest, while mommer wore gray satin.

Well, didn't I just hate having the head captain bow me to my prominent table and all? I sure got a big kick out of it, even although the eats was going to be ten a cover. And pretty soon our guests commenced arriving, and other people also, and when I looked around I thought, well, Wallace Reid may be at the next table and Chaplin just beyond, but I'm not so poor off myself, and closer to the dancing floor, at that! Also I had with me the Greytons, and Jack Blum and his Leghorn, and both of the Truemans, Slim Rolf and Bert of course, and that Barred Rock chicken friend of Blum's for Axel. I had also invited Major McGee that used to bawl me out about my make-up when I was a mere extra, and didn't I rub that in, just! Sweet daddy! I was very refined about it, of course, but quite unmistakable.

Besides these real distinguished-looking guests of mine there was yet to come two which was the most important to me, the great John Austin Nickolls himself, and my Stricky, who was scheduled to pack in the cocktails. Their vacant chairs made the whole table look empty to my eyes, and as the long minutes slipped by without them showing, the evening commenced to go sour for me. Maybe you know the feeling I had, talking to the ones at the table, laughing like a automat, and craning my neck and eyes both towards the door

all the time, my heart giving a jump every time a handsome man showed up between the hat-check boys, only to sink again when it turned out to be merely Doug Fairbanks or someone. The waiters served the soup in spite of me who was trying to wait for cocktails, and then, just as I had about decided Stricky was dying of an accident in some hospital, I seen him come in the door.

At the sight a sweet feeling of sudden ease and relief come over me, and then as he approached a cold hand clutched my heart, for Stricky was drunk as a fool, and he had Anita Lauber with him.

Now I had on purpose not asked Anita to my party. I just couldn't, somehow, out of respect to what Mrs. Greyton, who was certainly a perfect lady, might feel. Also somewhat on account of my own self. It is hard to write a crabby thing like that without appearing to be a awful prune, and somehow feeling I had ought to apologize for my morality. I don't know what it was ailed me, New England or something, but I couldn't help feeling that way, and any intelligent public will understand. I was fond of Anita and would not of gone back on her in any jam she might be in and so forth. But asking her to my party was entirely different and I had not done it.

However, there she was, both she and Strick as wet as a bootlegger with seven legged boots, and what was I to do? Somehow or other I kept my face, even when Stricky took the place beside me which I had meant for Nickolls, and put Anita next to him.

Sick? Sweet daddy! Terrible thoughts commenced

racing through my head, and yet I had to keep smiling! Where had these two been? How come they was together? So this was why Strick had excused himself from escorting me and mommer over to the hotel—he had planned all along to bring her! It was like knives going through me, these thoughts was. I could not eat. I sat there in the middle of the enormous gay room with its lights and music and laughing voices, a regular dumb-bell.

“Say, listen!” says Stricky to me in a thick voice. “Ain’t you glad to see your old pal? Speak to her, can’t you?”

“Hello, Anita,” I says over his body, and wishing it was his dead one. “Have you got your stage make-up on, dear?”

“Oh, Bonnie darling, how bad you look to-night!” says she. “Ain’t you feeling well, dear? I think it was so sweet of Stricky to insist on me coming to his party. But then he is awful good to me!” she ended with a silly laugh.

So that was it! His party! He was good to her! For a minute I felt I couldn’t bear it, and I turned to him in a sharp undertone.

“Gregory Strickland, how dared you!” I says.

“Say, listen!” says Strickland roughly. “You shut up! You make me sick, Bonnie. I’m through, and if you pull any nonsense about it I’ll start something, see?”

He made a swift gesture to his hip and I saw that what he had there was not the conventional flask, but a gun—my gun, or rather, Nickolls’. Then he turned

his shoulder and started talking to Anita in a whisper, swaying. A new, strange, horrible man.

For a moment my head kind of swam. If he had actually pulled the gun I could not of been more terrified. I had been morally sure that Stricky had that gun, but not quite. And now it was a positive fact that Stricky was, among other things, a thief.

The fact of his dishonesty was the least of my worries right then, however, because what might he not do with the revolver in a drunken fit? If only I could get it away from him! If only Nicky would show, perhaps he would be able to help, would know what to do. But for some reason Nickolls didn't turn up. Twice I sent the captain out looking for him, but it was no good. He wasn't at his home, either, because I got Bert to phone.

How I ever got through the rest of that horrible evening is a wonder to me yet. I guess a person who is pinned down under a car in a railroad accident must have about the same sensations as I underwent. But I talked and my guests talked and we even laughed, I can't imagine at what! And then at last thank heaven it was time to go home. Somebody says come on let us all go over to John's place it is after one and all the other joints will be closed.

But going to John's place would of been one too many for me, so I crocheted a gag about well home was still open and I believed I would go there, so finally I was able to shake the bunch, and mommer and I got in a taxi and started for home.

In the cab I reached blindly for mommer's hand and

found it and held it tight, sitting stiff and silent in the dark, my love all turned rancid but my pride and vanity laid open to the raw. Through the thick soft darkness mommer's voice kept bursting out every little while, like lightning.

"The brute!" she says. "The hound! What did I tell you about him, Bonnie dearie? Didn't I always say he was a cheap, good-for-nothing ham? And a dirty low-life? I knew it, Bonnie dearie, I just knew it and I always did say so! Now don't you grieve over him, honey, he ain't worth it. You know they say love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence. But I always say if that was so no woman would live to be over sixteen!"

For the first time her voice couldn't touch nor comfort me. I felt transported into a new strange world. Why, everything had been strange all evening! There was me a hostess to top circles of picture people, to begin with. That wasn't normal. Then there was also me on the edge of being a well-known star and already announced as such. That couldn't of been true, either! Or me riding home with a mother of my own to a beautiful home of my own. No, no! Small wonder the thing went and crashed! It all had ought to of been a dream, a beautiful dream too good to last. Yet here I actually was, riding in the taxi with mommer, her strong clasp crushing my diamond ring into my flesh, my expensive dress heavy and soft against my knees, my wrap warm and perfumed about my face and shoulders. Yes, it was real! I was Bonnie Delane, the Nickolls star, going home to my lovely house. The

only lie, the only untrue thing was Stricky and his ghastly behavior.

It seemed a thousand years before the taxi reached our district and when at last it did and stopped in front of our place I got out, still in my sick dream, and stood helplessly beside mommer while she paid the driver off, I staring at the house meanwhile and dimly realizing there was something wrong with it, but not what. Mommer made it clear, however, the very minute she turned her attention towards it.

"My land, Bonnie!" says she. "Did you leave all them lights burning when we come out?"

"Why," says I, stupidly, blinking at the place, "I did not! At least I don't remember. But I certainly think they was all turned off!"

Well, the house was lighted from parlor to attic. Every window was glowing and in many of them the shades not even pulled down. The porch light was on, too, and for just a moment a person couldn't help but wonder if maybe the place was on fire. But it was just the lights, as we could right away see.

CHAPTER XXII

“DO you suppose we been robbed?” I says as we hurried up the path. “And they left them burning?”

“Not a chance!” says mommer, panting along beside me. “Californians are pretty good advertisers, I will admit, but I don’t hardly think even Californian burglars would go that far!”

“But who could it be at this hour?” says I. “Oh, mommer, I’m sure something more is wrong!”

“Don’t be a nitwit, honey!” says Adele. “Here, let me open the door! Maybe I did leave them lights on, though it ain’t like me.”

Well, mommer took the key from my hand, but it seemed she didn’t need it. For although the door was shut, it opened the minute she give it a touch, and we went in, shaking like a loose-leaf date book or something.

Inside, on our Early Spanish combination hatrack and umbrella stand which I had got to keep my golf sticks in, was a strange hat and coat—a man’s. They was thrown down on it any old which-way, and beside them was a bundle done up partly in brown and partially in newspaper, and the fortunately dead butt of a cigar was resting on the newel post of the staircase right at the feet of the Milo Venus I kept there.

“Well!” says mommer. “If it’s a burglar he must

of concluded we was in Honolulu at the very nearest!"

"It's no burglar, mommer," I says, my heart beating with a queer conviction that something was about to land on my shoulders. And just as I says that a funny sound come from the direction of the parlor.

We stood still as stone looking at each other intensely, and pretty soon it came again. It was a snore; a loud, firm, healthy snore, nothing more nor less; a practiced, customary snore, and there was something familiar about it to me. Right away I come to life and started to investigate, cutting across the hall in not over two jumps, pulling the parlor portieres to one side. And there sprawled in one of my blue velvet Spanish chairs, his boots off and on the hearth, his stocking feet crossed peacefully upon my new victrola lamp, was pop!

"My land!" says Adele's voice in a frightened whisper behind me. "Who ever would of thought it possible a person could sleep in one of them chairs!"

"Sweet daddy!" says I aloud.

At the sound of my voice pop come to, yawning and rousing himself with a shake like a big dog, just in the old way, and also in the old way taking my exclamation to himself as a well-deserved warm welcome.

"Yi-hi!" says he, bringing his feet down off the Victrola with a soft heavy thump. "Yes, Bonnie darlin', 'tis your sweet daddy himself, come all the way from the East to find his little girl!"

"Heavens!" says mommer. "Bonnie Delane, never tell me that is your father!"

"That's the idea I was brought up with," I says

briefly. "Although how he's traced me out is more than I can tell you; or how he got into my house, either!"

By this time pop had not alone put down his feet but stood upon them, twitching his baggy trousers down, and running his fingers like a comb through his mop of yellow hair. I had kind of forgotten how handsome pop was, but being reminded of it by suddenly seeing him this way didn't bring any enthusiasm with it, somehow. All I could think of was bad pennies and returnable cats, and so forth, and I begun to feel as mad as anything.

"Sure I got in by picking the lock," says pop, smiling good-naturedly. "A very simple lock ye have, Bonnie darlin,' for one that's fitted odd keys to people's trunks a good part of his life. Aren't ye going to give your poor old father a greeting at all?"

"Yes, pop!" I says, going over and letting him kiss me on the cheek but not returning it.

"And who is this handsome lady?" says pop then, one arm around my waist, looking at Adele and smiling his very best.

Adele blushed under it, but looked as pleased as an old fool, and of course I remembered my good manners, stunned as I was, and at once made them acquainted.

"Why this is mommer, pop," I says. And then the minute it was out I just stood there staring like a dumb-bell.

"The hell you say!" says my father, his jaw dropping and for once in his life all the wind taken out of him.

Then he recovered himself and a twinkle come into his eye. "Sure and I always was the lucky man!" says he.

"The impudence!" says Adele with a snort, taking offense at once. "Bonnie Delane—I—er—McFadden, I think that if you was going to ask this—this person here you might at least of told me in advance so's I could move my trunk out of the way!"

"Adele!" I says, leaving pop cold, and running to her in terror. "What are you talking about? I didn't know he was coming any more than the man in the moon! And you will move out of this house over my dead body only! Now for heaven's sake, let's sit down, all of us, and find out where we are."

Well, we did that, mommer on the settle, but looking far from it, pop slumping right back into the least uncomfortable chair in the room, and myself perched upon the edge of the refractory table, that being the way I felt, and for a minute all we done was to sit glaring at each other like we didn't know who ought to start something, but each of us feeling perfectly willing to be elected. The problem was really mine, however, so I cracked the ice.

"Well, pop!" I says. "Will you please tell me how you come to find out about where I was, and everything?"

"And where would I find that out except by the newspapers?" he demanded.

"But the Delane!" I says. "How did you know beyond that?"

"Well, it's a wise father who knows his own child from a picture in the newspapers," says pop. "But

they been full of you, Bonnie darling, and it's proud your old pop has been to point them out. You're a smart girl, Bonnie, and I always said ye had the great talent!"

"Yeh, you have proved quite some picker, pop!" says I. "I suppose I might of known the papers would let you on. But how did you get the money to come out, and why in the world did you do it?"

"Hush now, Bonnie!" says pop, very sweet and pathetic. "Sure I got to thinking of you out here all by your lone and you the young and handsome girl that you are, and it worried me, how there would be nobody to advise you about your money and so forth. So I sold the little shop, and here I am, and mighty glad to be here!"

"You sold the shop!" I says. "Why, pop, who would buy it, with all that mortgage on it?"

"Well, to tell the truth I didn't sell it exactly," says he. "Bushwell, the old devil, foreclosed on me at last. But I had the laugh on him in the end, for I'd just disposed of the entire contents for two hundred and fifty cash money."

"But, pop!" I says, feeling like I must be in a dream. "How about the big house? Who will look after it for Mr. Sherrill now that you are gone?"

"Why, daughter dear, the house can't run away, can it?" pop asked, kind of mildly indignant as if I was to blame. "It's stood there many a year, and will for many more, I'm thinking. I just turned the key in it, and brought the key along."

"Oh, my heaven!" I says with a groan. "I thought

you would learn some sense of responsibility if you was left to yourself. And look at you!"

"There now, dearie!" says pop. "I have certainly learned my responsibility. I come to see clear as day how I been neglecting you, and that I should come out and manage your affairs, no matter how much work it involves. What was my little business compared to yours? Tell me that!"

"Your duty was right there at the Sherrill house!" I snapped. "And you know it."

"Why, daughter!" says pop, opening his blue eyes very wide in that way he had, like a hurt child. "Why, daughter, surely you wouldn't have me a janitor, while you was a well-known actress? It would hurt your position!"

"Oh, dear, I suppose it would!" I says helplessly. "Somehow, pop, you always got a answer. But if you think you have come out here to live on me you can make a retake. Nothing doing."

"I was thinking I might go in the moving pictures myself," says pop cheerfully. "They say a lot of easy money can be picked up in them. And now will you explain who is my charming wife, over there with the frown on her that don't become her pretty face?"

Adele didn't say anything to this, and only moved her shoulder more towards him. But the frown come off, I noticed.

"Pop," says I, "this is the only mother I have ever known. She has done everything in the world for me that six ordinary ones might of, and I love her a lot. A girl has to have a mother out here, and she is mine

and nothing will make me give her up. Her name is Mrs. Delane."

"Madame!" says pop, going up to Adele and making her a sweeping bow. "Madame, I am proud to meet the beautiful mother of my—of—er—a charming daughter. Considering we have her in common, so to speak, I hope you won't mind our getting acquainted!"

"Sit down, do!" says Adele. "And don't be such a clown. There is no camera on us, Mr. McFadden, and you can act natural, unless of course you was born that way?"

"No matter what way I was born, dear Mrs. Delane," says pop, "I would gladly try to make meself over to suit your requirements."

"Well!" says Adele. "I must say that never before in all my experience as a mother have I been up against anything like this. They say truth is stranger than fiction, but I always say it might be if you could tell them apart!"

"Now, mommer!" I says, "don't you get excited, dear. I know I should of told you about pop before, but I was kind of trying to let him slip my memory."

"But I am in a real difficult situation!" says mommer unhappily. "I can't stay in this house if he does. I'm not a married woman."

"What!" says pop. "Holy cats!"

"And I'm not going to live here with him," Adele went on, ignoring his remarks. "What will folks say? There's your popper and there's your mommer! A fine mess!"

"I'll say she's right, pop," I admitted sadly.

"What'll we do? Before you answer, let me again remark that Adele and me will stay together. And what is further, I don't intend to support you."

"Of course not!" says pop readily. "But how can I get work out here in this strange place where nobody knows me? What do you suggest, Bonnie dear?"

Well, when pop pulled that old familiar line all I had to do was close my eyes and I could smell the corned beef and cabbage in the basement kitchen of the old Sherrill house back in Stonybrook. I had actually to grab hold of my spangled evening dress to make sure it was not my gingham house wrapper. There come over me the old sensation of being merely pop's daughter; a young thing accustomed to minding him, and to taking the raw end of it for him.

Was I to be my own boss or was he to drag me back into childhood in some mysterious, sinister way, and make me his slavey again? That was the big question. Although there wasn't one word spoken on the subject, the battle between the two of us filled the room so that you could almost see it. It was just like our two wills were swelling and straining until we pretty near crowded the very furniture out.

And then all at once I knew I had won. I could feel pop give in, and I was almost sorry, while at the same time immensely glad that I was cut loose from him forever. I was suddenly so completely free of his will that I could really see him now and talk to him—you know—like two human beings instead of two relatives. And he could never catch me again because this was a matter of my generation making its breakaway. I drew a

long breath and opened my eyes, which had up to this point been unconsciously shut. I turned to pop and spoke, perfectly at ease.

"I know just what will suit you fine, pop!" says I, smiling. "You wouldn't like working in the pictures. It's awful hard, really. You better ranch it."

"How's that?" says he.

"Well, I have a beautiful little olive ranch up the valley," says I, "and I will give it to you free and clear. There's quite a few bearing trees on it, and the life would be ideal."

"Why, that's so!" says pop enthusiastically. "I always did fancy I'd make a fine landowner. And all you have to do out in this country is sit and watch the fruit grow, they tell me."

"Just that!" says I. "Here—I'll do it now, provided you will promise to move out there and start your ranching by noon to-morrow."

I went over to the inquisition kitchen-cabinet thing and dug out the deed of the Arroyo del Rey Development property and handed it to pop.

"There!" says I. "I'll make it over to you entire. Now you got a real chance to prove what you are worth."

"Daughter dear!" says pop, taking the deed in one hand and my face in the other. "Sure you're the finest girl a father ever had! I'll make a fortune off them trees, you'll see, and you will never have to work, after, the longest day you live!"

Well, I caught sight of Adele's face behind him, and if she wasn't mugging! The sentimental look

she was registering had ought to of been preserved in a blue plush album with white forget-me-nots painted on it! So I played up to my audience a little, kissed pop, and then we all made for the hay, pop commenting loudly on what a fine house I had, and so forth, as we went the rounds putting out the lights, which he had turned on in order to give it the thorough once-over while waiting for us.

"I think, Bonnie honey," says Adele in a whisper at the door of my room, "that your father is pretty near the finest-looking man I ever seen. So distankay!"

"Yes, he's handsome," I admitted wearily. "If he was as hard-working as he is easy-looking he'd have old John D. borrowing pennies off him."

"Well," says Adele with a sentimental sigh, "I know they say handsome is as handsome does, but I always say, if you have two loaves, sell one, and buy white hyacinths to feed your soul."

With which she kissed me good night and left me to lock myself in my room, all the sorrow in the world rushing back upon me. And as per usual, when I had pulled off a satisfactory cry I got up and took a good look at the picture of Milton Sherrill which was on my mantelpiece.

I had made up to Milt for taking him off of my bureau, by blowing him to a real handsome art frame of Spanish leather, to match the Spanish house, and he had occupied the center of this shelf ever since we got settled, with no competition in the line of ornaments except a pair of purple china parrots and a brace of

wrought-iron candlesticks, called that way, I suppose, because they represented a guy wrestling with some snakes and they certainly was wrought up all right. Well anyways, Milton held the center of the camera so to speak, and now I went over and looked at him as soon as I had dried my tears enough to be able to see him good.

Pop was from home, and so was Milt. But pop brought only mean memories with him, while with the thought of Milton Sherrill come a sense of fine things, such as clear skies over the cold blue of Long Island Sound; apple blossoms falling on my bare head in the old orchard behind the big house; a bird singing in the early morning and piercing into my heart; the song I my own self used to sing while polishing the front door knocker, happy because it was on the door to the Dream-man's mother's home. And drool like that. But so important to remember! His straight look came out to me from his photo like a light in a dark place. And all of a sudden I knew I had never loved Gregory Strickland at all.

I carried Milt's picture back to my bureau after a while and took it out of the leather frame. Then I took Stricky's picture with the "Yours to the end of time" written across it out of its solid gold frame and slowly tore the picture up in little bits. Stricky's nose was left all by itself on the top of the pile of scraps. So I tore that even smaller, but without wishing it was real, or any other feeling. And then I put Milton into the gold frame and went to bed, strangely tired and

quiet all over my whole entire body. And the next thing I knew, mommer was knocking on the door and calling through my dreams.

“That Greg Strickland is downstairs!” she says.
“He says he’s got to see you quick!”

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE is a custom in moving pictures called shooting at the moon, and said custom generally gets put into action when the scenario department is going cuckoo for lack of a plot.

Well, when this happens the gang gets together and sits around the office and says here, we simply got to get a plot; they have already started making the picture, so we will now commence crocheting a few gags together, come on, boys, shoot at the moon! And then someone, maybe the camera-man will say well Bill I think a good idea would be for this girl, see, to be stuck on this feller, see? And then the director will say, sure Joe, but he can't marry her, see, because of his father's will. And that probably gives the continuity writer a hunch, and he or she will come across with say I can improve on that, his father's will provides this feller must marry a certain girl, see, and the father don't know that this girl is really the right girl, see? And by now the head of the scenario department has taken his mind out for a little exercise and it is just beginning to get warmed up and so he says, all right, but this girl knows she is the right one all the time, see, and only pretends to be a poor working girl because she don't want the boy to marry her for her money. And so by now they have a good, original plot, and this way of getting it is called shooting at the moon.

Well, the morning after pop unexpectedly showing at our house and all, I was in a position of having to take a crack at the moon myself, especially when mommer says Stricky is down stairs and wants he should see you and so forth. Her words got me out of bed like they was a derrick, but as soon as I had put my feet on the floor I quit cold, and sat on the edge of the hay thinking rapidly what would I do. They had started making the drama, but I hadn't any script ready. This was not at all the way I had planned the piece to run, for I had no more idea that Gregory Strickland would dare to ever come anywheres near me again in his whole entire life, than I had of asking him to do such a thing. My first thought was I will not see him. And then on second considering I changed my mind and decided no, I will see him because after all I will probably have to, some day. And just as it is wise to get a cavity in your tooth filled before it stops hurting, and not go around with it open and liable to get something in it at a restaurant or some place and commence throbbing all over again when you least expect it, so it is a good bet to get any other painful interview over. The sooner the quicker.

So I called out "All right mommer I will come" and set out to make myself look as pretty as I possibly could so's Stricky would thoroughly appreciate what he had lost. And then I went slowly downstairs to where he was walking up and down all alone in the parlor like a wild man. At least that is what I thought as I reached the lowest step on the stairs. But I soon found out different, for Stricky's steps was not nervous

anxiety, but jazz. He had put a number on the phonograph and was snapping his fingers to it as I come in the door. This was really more than I intended standing for, and I pointed at my early Spanish phonograph with a dramatic finger.

"Kill that number!" I says. "I can't stand it!"

"Sure I will!" says Stricky, obliging. "What's the matter, honey, got a bad head?"

Well, for a moment I couldn't hardly believe my ears! His manner was just like ordinary, and a person would of thought that nothing unusual had happened.

"Say, listen," he went on, "I feel great this morning, considering. I found a new pick-me-up that would cure a wood-alcohol case. Let me fix you up a little, Bonnie. Some party we had, eh?"

"Greg," I says quietly, "you know I don't need any pick-me-up. If I have a head this morning, it wasn't liquor caused it. Do you remember anything you done last night?"

He got silent for a moment, then he shrugged his shoulders and give a little laugh.

"Oh, that!" he says. "You mean Anita, I suppose. Well, what of it? We was on a party, that's all! Forget it."

"No, I can't forget it," I says. "I want you to understand that. I am through, Greg."

"Say listen!" he says. "Don't begin and pull any line of bunk like that. A party is a party and any little old thing is liable to happen on it. Besides, what I do is my business."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," says I. "Entirely your own business and none of mine, from now on."

"Oh well, if you are going to get jealous," says Stricky, "go ahead. I'm fed up, anyways. I only came around this morning because I thought we might as well kiss and make up. It's all in a lifetime if you won't!"

Well, I just stood looking at him and wondering did I really know this man? His hair, like black glass, was the same, his tie was as perfect, his whole freshly washed effect was as snappy as it had always been. Even his fine high color didn't seem to of been affected much by being so wet last night. But I didn't know him any more. He was just some stranger that had wandered in: a objectionable one which I didn't care to get any better acquainted with. Maybe you know how it is to stand that way in front of a person who you have wrapped your life around day and night for a long time, and suddenly see them clear? Sweet daddy, it's a queer sensation! The only satisfaction in it would be to have the upper hand through the other person still caring. But Stricky didn't even leave me that.

"I see," says I at length, "that we had come near to making a awful mistake. I'm not going to pretend I will ever be friends with you, Strick. As for our contract with Nicky, I don't know what to say. I could no more go on playing opposite you than—oh well, I just naturally couldn't pull it off, that's all!"

"Say listen, you needn't worry about that!" says Greg, sneering his eyebrows in a cool, unpleasant way and calmly lighting a cigarette. "Don't trouble about not playing with me, old girl, because I am going with the Divers Comedies for my next picture, anyway!"

Well, this pretty near took me off my feet, for I knew Stricky's contract run for another six months. What did he mean? Nickolls had let him out for some reason. That was of course good, and relieved me from a lot of unpleasantness, but just the same something in the way Strick pulled the line made me uneasy. It wasn't all on account of Anita now also being with the Divers Comedies, either, although I will admit that while I was finished with Strick forever, I was yet female enough for the thought to give me a little pang, and it was no good saying to myself, well, all right you can have him, dearie, and may God pity you! Because while of course I made that conventional remark in my brain and knew it for a mighty wise crack, still my vanity hurt under it. And if you are a woman who has lost a unworthy man, you will get me perfectly if some other woman has beaten you to it and grabbed him before you had the chance of firing him.

"Greg Strickland," I says slowly, "I am glad to hear you got another job so soon after Nicky giving you the air, which I suppose he must of done this forenoon."

"Air, hell!" says Strick, leaning against the piano and grinning at me. "Say, listen, he didn't give me

any gate! I just grabbed off a job, that's all. I got to eat, you know!"

"Strick!" I says. "Whatter you mean?"

"Don't ask me, kid," says he, still smiling, and pointing with his cigarette over my shoulder towards the door. "Don't ask me, ask Nickolls!"

Well, I turned around bewildered, and there in the door was Nicky. His face was white and drawn, and he looked ten years older than when I had seen him last. All of a sudden I remembered how he hadn't been on my party the night before, nor sent me any word about why not, or anything. Something had happened to him in the meantime, something dreadful that had wiped all the pep out of him.

"Nicky!" I cried, running over to him and grabbing him by the lapels. "What is it, Nicky? Oh! You look awful!"

"Bonnie, little Bonnie!" he says, putting both his hands over mine. Then he stopped short. It didn't seem like he could go on. Across the room Strickland's voice was flung at us like a hoot.

"Ha ha! I guess you can do with a little sympathy, eh? Mister Producer Nickolls?" says he. "So you were going to let me out of my contract because you didn't care for my influence on your lot! Oh, boy!"

"So the dirt has got around already, has it?" says Nickolls quietly, leading me into the room. "You are very quick to blow with the wind, Strickland, but it's about what I would have expected of you."

"Say, listen," says Strick, his face going kind of pasty with anger, and his eyes narrowing down to

little black slits—"say listen, you're through telling me what I'm to do, see? Or what you think of me. I've taken a great deal of language from you on the lot, because I had to, but now I don't. And just kindly remember that I didn't have to accept the release you offered me yesterday. That contract is sound and I could sue you for six months' salary and get it! I expect you knew what was going to happen last night, when you offered to let me go! You knew the distributors wouldn't take your lousy picture, and you were trying to save your skin!"

Nicky went as white as a sheet and the strong muscles of his face commenced working strangely. He looked like a Japanese war god or something and I felt terribly afraid, while all across my mind blazed the terrible words like they was written in fire. "The distributors wouldn't take your picture." It was monstrous, incredible, there must be some mistake! Nicky was moving slowly towards Strickland, his face still working, his hand clenched down at his sides by a terrible effort of self-control.

"You swine!" he says in a low voice like a lion snarling. "You low swine! That's a lie and you know it. The picture is one of the finest that has ever been made and you know that! I've endured your crawling around me as long as I can, but when you accuse me of the kind of cheating which comes naturally to your own rotten mind I'm through and I'm going to beat you up! Come outside!"

"Bonnie!" says Strick at the top of his voice. "Make him lay off!"

Nicky give an ugly laugh and shot out a big hand, landing in Greg's collar and jerking him away from the piano.

"Come out of this!" he says. "Or shall I have to carry you out before I pound you to death?"

"Nicky! Don't!" I cried, flying at him. "Don't dirty your hands. Please—oh, please don't fight!"

"Well, I don't want to fight!" says Greg, still shrill and high. "Leave me alone, Nickolls!"

"Oh, don't kill him, Nicky!" I says. "Please! Only pretty near kill him!"

"I can't fight a squash pie!" says Nicky disgustedly, having by then dragged Greg as far as the door. "He won't stand up long enough for me to knock him down!"

"I'll go! I'll go!" says Greg, being shoved out into the hall. "But you needn't think I'll forget this, I'll get square with you, you big roughneck! I'll get you yet!"

"Oh, put him out!" I cried.

And Nicky did, sending his pearl-gray hat and yellow cane after him and slamming the door hard. Then he come back into the room wiping his hands on a big linen handkerchief and smiling.

"There!" he says. "That's the first thing I have enjoyed in twenty-four hours! It's been coming to me for a long time, too!"

"Nicky," I cried, "sit down and tell me everything! What has happened? Why weren't you at my party last night and what is all this about Cinderella?"

The flush of triumph and satisfaction come right

off of Nicky's map at this, and he looked old and worn and white again.

"Little Bonnie," says he, "you don't think I'm a crook?"

"Don't be a dumb-bell!" says I, "I know you, Nicky. What's all the dirt?"

"Bonnie," says he heavily, "one thing Strickland said was true. The distributors have refused the picture!"

"But they haven't seen it!" I gasped.

"They saw it last night," says Nicky briefly. "That was why I didn't come to your party."

"Sweet daddy!" says I. "How on earth did that happen?"

"Benny Silvermount called me up at about four yesterday," says Nicky, "and said that he had to go out of town to-day and that several of the board were free for the evening. Naturally I suggested showing it. Well, I did!"

"And they turned it down?" I says, stunned. "But Nicky, it don't seem possible. Why, that picture is wonderful, any way you look at it. They must be crazy!"

"Crazy like a pack of foxes!" says Nicky bitterly. "They knew it was a good picture. They were acting on Big Benny's orders, that was all!"

"But why should he order such a thing?" I says hotly. "Benny is a business man and that's a great picture. It would earn him big money."

"It will be still more profitable for him to keep it off the market," says Nicky more quietly now. "I'll

explain how it is, little Bonnie. You remember, of course, that the Big Egg threatened to break me? Well, he's done it, that's all. He knows Alias Cinderella is a wonderful picture. He even told me so, frankly, as we came out. He said it was one of the best he had ever seen, and that you were superb in it. Thank God you won't lose anything! You can go right back to him."

"I won't!" I says indignantly. "I'm going to stay right where I am. With you."

Nickolls smiled and patted my hand.

"You don't get the idea, yet," he says. "You're a thoroughbred, Bonnie, but unfortunately there will be nothing to stick to. I'm broke. I'll have to go out and look for a job myself, and you will be obliged to do the same."

"But Cinderella——" I commenced when he stopped me by a gesture.

"Practically every first-class picture theater in the country is controlled by either Silvermount or Muro," says he. "And those two concerns, with Knute, constitute the best and practically the only distributing agency. I could state-right my picture, of course, and that is what I shall do. But it will be a slow business, and the chances are that I won't even get back the money I have put into it. Which of course precludes my going out after new capital."

"But can't you make Benny change his mind?" I says.

"Why should he change it?" Nickolls asked. "He will buy in that film cheap at the end of six months,

and reissue it through the Big Three. It will not have been hurt in the meanwhile because only the program houses in a few small towns will have shown it. Probably the Big Three will retitile it, and send it out as a new issue. And in the meanwhile I will crawl back asking for work. Damn their hides!"

He buried his face in his hands, his strong fingers clutching at his curly hair. But somehow he didn't look broken, even in that position—only slightly bent, maybe. I laid a hand on his shoulder and he looked up into my eyes straight and clear, so that my heart just regularly ached for him.

"Nicky," I says solemnly, "I wouldn't say I don't care about Cinderella's not getting released, because I do—horribly! But I'll tell the world I would not give up having made it, and made it with you, and what is further, made it right, like we did, for all the success in the world. It's a great picture and you know it and I know it, and nobody can take that away from us. The experience we went through together in that work is something to keep sacred in this part of the country, and to—well, to sort of live by!"

Nicky didn't say anything for a moment. And then he leaned over and kissed me gently on the cheek.

"Little Bonnie, thank you!" he says. And then he got to his feet. "Well now, I have a lot of things to attend to," says he in a different voice, "and I'll have to dust. You take my advice and go to see Silvermount. Benny has his eye on you and he'll grab you back."

"Never!" I says fiercely. "After he's pulled a dirty trick like that? Not much, I won't!"

"I like your spirit, child," says he, smiling sadly, "but it's not good sense. Think it over."

He started for the door, then thought of something and turned back.

"By the way," he says, "that revolver of mine—would you mind letting me have it?"

"Nicky!" I screamed, a sudden coldness coming over me. He frowned slightly and shook his head.

"Bonnie, Bonnie, I thought you knew me better!" says he reproachfully. "I wouldn't do a thing of that sort. Why child, I'm not a quitter, I'm a fighter! This will be an interlude for me, that's all. I'll go back and lie low, and later, try again."

"Oh, Nicky, excuse me, please!" I says, half crying. "And, Nicky, I haven't got the gun. Honest, I haven't. Greg Strickland took it. I saw it on him last night. I'm awful sorry."

"Well, never mind," says Nicky. "It belonged to my dad, that's why I asked for it. Confound that skunk of a Strickland, I don't want him to have it, either. Well, so long, Bonnie, and don't you worry about my committing suicide—I'm too interested in pictures for that!"

For a long time after the outside door had closed upon Nicky I stood looking out the window, face to face with a nodding spray of heliotrope from the vine around the frame. The soft wind brought in that everlasting smell of cedar wood burning and crude oil and dried eucalyptus leaves. And now the perfume

of the heavy heliotrope clusters too. I kind of bathed my face in it like, not trying to think as yet, but feeling awful tired and let down. Far away at the other end of the house I could hear voices talking, but they didn't mean anything to me. I felt like nothing was going to mean anything to me ever again. And then after a while the door to the hall opened and mommer put in her head.

She was all dressed to go out, and looked unusually snappy and attractive, even for her, and if I had been in any mood for it I would of asked why all the prinking? But before I could say a word mommer had the floor her own self.

"Mr. Nickolls gone?" she says. "Well, Bonnie, I been helping your poor dear father get ready to move. I just gathered up a few odds and ends we don't really need down here and they will make him a lot more comfortable. I put together some canned goods and some coffee and so forth in a basket, so's he'd have something in the house right away. And them blankets off the spare-room bed, and a couple of sofa pillows. And I thought that if you was through with your business affairs you might just run out to the ranch in the car, and we will take these things along and help him to get to rights, the poor man!"

"All right, mommer!" I says listlessly. "Just wait until I get on my street clothes."

"Before you go upstairs, dear," says mommer—"there is a man at the door. He says it's the installments on the piano, and that they are two weeks overdue."

Well at that, believe me I come to sudden life. Right out of a clear sky there jumped down a ghostly army of bill collectors, crowding even my big drawing room and shaking unpaid bills at me. I was cold with terror, for there was not alone the piano man, but the phonograph man, the furniture man, the notes on the car, on the house, on my ring. There was collectors from department stores, from my fan-picture photographer, from everywhere, all around me. I felt like they would suffocate me. Due, due—everything was due—and I hadn't even a job any more!

"Well," says mommer, placidly drawing on her gloves, all unconscious of this imaginary yet real crew that was attacking me, "I said the cash mightn't be convenient just now, and he says he will take a note on the piano. What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him to take G sharp!" says I, and run upstairs laughing hysterically while mommer just stood there staring after me with her mouth open.

CHAPTER XXIV

A MONTH later I was what you might call still in the same position. By which I do not mean running upstairs, but I'll say I was running just the same, because by now the sheriff was about one jump behind me. As a matter of geography, I and Axel was sitting in our bathing suits under one of those bright umbrellas that flock so thick around Crystal Pier, and talking about ourselves. Axel had at this time just finished the heavy part of a footman in a McGee production where he would surely show at least three times during the picture, for as long as five seconds each time. But Axel wasn't contented, even although I pointed out it was at least a part, which was more than I had. There being no money to spend enjoying ourselves, we was indulging in the poor-folks pastime of belly-aching.

"Ay tank Ay fail because Ay don't speak English so good," says Axel very serious. "If Ay speak better English, Ay betchew may life Ay got better parts!"

Well, I'll say that was the prize alibi for failure to progress in the pictures, because lookit Pola Negri. But I needed Axel to howl to, myself, so of course I had to agree with him.

"It's a crime the way they don't appreciate what a

wonderful actor you are," I says. "You ought to have a big future, Axel."

"But you, Bonnie!" says Axel, plainly pleased. "How you tank I will get appreciated ven you don't? Have you not got anything yet?"

Well, for a moment I was going to pull the conventional "Why, I have a big offer and while I haven't signed up yet, I expect to in a coupla days." Then I considered why throw the bull to a friend, and I did kind of want somebody to talk things out with. I had Adele of course. But since pop had shown, I didn't have her so much of the time as before. Somehow it always seemed like there was something out at the ranch that needed to be done and only mommer could do it. Axel was about the only one at hand, Nicky having gone East on a trip. And so I come clean.

"Axel," I says, "honest, I don't know what am I going to do! I haven't the smell of a contract, even, except, Axel, the contracts I have made with installment people and so forth. Something has got to break for me pretty soon or I will. Even the grocer had kind of a nasty look in his eye this morning."

"Why don't you hock your ring?" says Axel, mentioning my big chunk of ice which I still wore.

"Installment," I says briefly. "Just the same as everything else. I must of been cuckoo, I guess, when we started Alias Cinderella. Oh, Axel, I don't want to lose what I've gained—my pretty home, my car, everything! Why, I'm pledged for them! And do you know that after The Mischief Maker was released I

had all kinds of offers? Now something mysterious has sprung up between me and every producer on the Coast!"

"Except one," says Axel.

"Except Silvermount, yes!" says I fiercely. "But I won't go there! I won't!"

"Big Benny ban making tha other fallars hold off you," says Axel.

"He's got some kind of agreement with them, I suppose," I says sadly. "But it doesn't seem as if I could ask him for work. It isn't fair or right that I should have to. Why, I'd feel like I was double-crossing Nicky if I was to go to Silvermount now."

"Nickolls don't feel like that," says Axel unexpectedly, reaching for the copy of Wid's, which he had brought out along with his bath towel. "Ay see he bane going to Artlife!"

"What?" says I. "Give me that, Axel! Oh, Nicky, they've beat you for sure!"

And Axel was right. On the front page was a notice about how Nicky had signed up in New York and was coming back to the Coast to make some special productions—a new line of stuff based on classic literary stories and plays, and that he would use a big group of feature players, but no star.

"Kind of a stock company," says Axel. "Vell, Ay suppose tha fallars with the name gets all the parts, youst like usual!"

But I didn't pay any attention to his crape-hanging, for I was inspired. My way was now sort of cleared for me. If Nicky actually felt he could go back, and

went first, why so could I. I sure did hate that outfit for what they had done to us, but I and Nicky were both helpless against them. We had to have the work, and didn't they just know it! I thought of mommer and how I owed it to her not to stand in my own and her light any more; and of pop, too, who of course had to be given a small allowance until his crop was in, and believe me it was just like pop to be the one person in the bunch who required actual cash money, while I and mommer struggled along on a steadily weakening credit. And so, with one reason and another leading me on, I decided to go up and see the Big Egg and tell him well I am back, the prodigious daughter and all that, and when do I commence working?

"Well, Axel," I says, "I guess they have me beat, too. Temporarily, anyways. I'll go job-hunting this very afternoon, and in the meanwhile I have got the price of a coupla hamburger sandwiches if you have got the strength to go and buy them—and no onions in mine to-day!"

Well, Axel had, and little did I think the day would ever come when a ten-cent hot with pickles would be my honest-to-goodness lunch and I glad to get it, and even less did I think it could possibly be the case that I would eat such lunch while a enormous white automobile that was at least technically mine, waited parked beyond the bathing pavilion! But such is pictures, and as mommer often truly said "Spend and the world spends with you, charge it, and you spend alone."

Well anyways, I enjoyed my sandwich down to the very last bite, and would of enjoyed that, too, only just before taking it, I happened to look up, and who would I see but Anita and Stricky, both in bathing suits and a very affectionate manner, parking themselves under a near-by umbrella. Well, that took my appetite completely, and I got right up and threw the last bite of my sandwich away and ain't Providence wonderful? As that bite of sandwich hit the sand I seen it had onion in it! So only for them two showing, I would of eaten it unconsciously, and throwing it in their direction expressed my feelings pretty good, too. I never saw one without the other any more, and believe me when they hove into view I hove out. Which, as Hollywood is not a big world, meant that the three of us led a pretty active life.

Well, this day I got up and gave them the beach, and when we was dressed I drove Axel back to Vine Street, where he was still living with Mrs. Snifter on account he could never seem to get even with, much less ahead, of his room rent. And then I went home and dolled myself up to knock Benny cold.

It was one thing to walk up to the Silvermount offices a unknown hicklette from the East, another to arrive as a star, driving my own boat, or so it was for all they knew, and march into the office knowing I was doing them a favor by coming at all. The girl behind the window smiled and reached for the push button as soon as she seen me, and I walked confidently in past a lot of respectful hams which was warming the mourner's benches.

"Who did you wish to see, Miss Delane?" says she, confidential-like, once I was in.

"Mr. Silvermount, please, dear!" says I.

"I think he's here," says she. "Do you know where his new office is? Down the corridor and turn to the left. The first door. You can go right in."

This was news to me. So they had moved the head office since I had been on the lot! I trotted along the dark hallway until I come to the proper door, knocked, and the girl says come in, and there in a small dark office with the stenographer right in the same room and everything, was Benny Silvermount in shirt sleeves and cigar.

"Well, hello, if it ain't Miss Delane!" says he, actually getting up to shake hands. "How's tricks, eh?"

"Oh, very good, thanks," says I. "I been awful busy—that is, I—could I talk to you alone, Mr. Silvermount?"

"Why, sure! Sure!" says Benny. "You could take them specifications over to Major McGee's office, Ella, and you shouldn't come back until I ring."

Well, this Ella went off, and the Big Egg drew up a chair for me.

"Well, now, we got it nice and cozy, ain't it?" he says amiably. Not a bit excited over me turning up. But what was a person to expect?

"Is there now something I could do for you, Bonnie?" he goes on. "It's quite a while since we seen you around this lot!"

"Too long a while, Mr. Silvermount," I says. "That's what I come about."

"So?" says he.

Then he frowned a little, looked at me like a question mark, flicked an ash off the fat cigar, reparked it and left things up to me. I begun to wish right then and there that I hadn't been in such a hurry, but had waited until mommer come home from the ranch, and brought her along to kind of overpower him. But if it was up to me to crack the ice, why I would do it.

"I was just thinking," I says, "that I am about rested now, and I don't mind if I go back to work. Provided the salary, part and so forth, are satisfactory, of course."

"Huhu!" says he calmly. "So that's it!"

"Of course I don't want to tie myself up for very long," I says, "because I got a good many offers I am considering, but I thought that after you coming to see me the way you did, why I would give you first chance of getting me."

"Well now, that is real good of you," says Benny politely. "I appreciate it a lot."

He let silence flop between us then like a regular wet blanket. I commenced to feel uneasy.

"Well, Mr. Silvermount?" I says.

"Well, that's just it!" says he, shifting the cigar to the other side of his face and chewing on the end of it. "That's just it!"

"What do you mean?" I says, nearly wild. He was like a stone wall—everything I said to him bounded right back at me. "You know the last time I saw you, you were acting very different, Mr. Silver-

mount. I was to come to you any time—don't you remember?"

"Yes, but that was three months ago," says he, like he was referring to at least the Middle Ages. "All of three months ago!"

"But I haven't changed any since then!" I told him. "I'm even better than I was. Are you sore at me because I wouldn't come back until Nicky did? I will be honest with you, Mr. Silvermount, that was what changed my mind."

"Is Nicky coming back?" says he, sitting up in his chair sharp and sudden. "Good! That's fine!"

"But sweet daddy!" says I. "Didn't you know it?"

"No," says he, sinking back again.

"Look here, Mr. Silvermount!" I says sharply, getting to my feet and thumping the desk, and believe me I had him cornered and he knew it because this was a small quartered-oak desk with no hall of refuge under it. "Look here, what's wrong?" I says. "Are you going to give me a contract or are you not?"

"Now, now, don't get excited!" he says, showing more life. "No, I am not going to give you a contract, but don't get excited!"

"And why aren't you going to give it to me?" I says, near to crying. "You promised me!"

"I know, I know, but I tell you I can't do it!" says Benny wildly. "I ain't got the power!"

"Well, sweet daddy!" says I. "Why not? Ain't you the president of this corporation?"

"Sure, I'm president!" says he, waving both arms

like windmills. "But now I am it in name only. The stockholders have made a lot of fuss and nonsense, Miss Bonnie, and they sent a feller down here to take charge of finances, and he thinks he can run the whole shooting match! Everything, mind you, he's got the power to do! Why, I got no more ability to hire you than a cat!"

"What?" says I. "Do you mean to tell me the Silvermount is in an installment collec—a receiver's hands?"

"No, not at all!" says Benny. "But we will be soon, with this know-all running the place! I wish you could hear the things that man asks me! What ability has such a person got? Why was that one hired? How should I know about my friends? And I'm to tell where this money went, and why no estimate was made for that, and where the appropriation has gone for the other! My heavens, how can a man in pictures bother with such details? Two weeks he's been here already, and he's got a time clock on the lot and a filing-report system! He thinks you can make pictures like in a factory! Let him wait, that's all!"

"Sweet daddy!" says I. "But surely he lets you hire the hams, don't he?"

"Not much!" says Big Benny, collapsing into his chair and groaning. "He says the salaries we pay is crazy, and he must O. K. every cent before we can spend it. Why, I couldn't hand you any contract if you was to pay me for it. He's a hard nut, that feller, with a face and heart on him like a stone. But you

go talk to him if you want—and say nothing about you're a friend of mine, or me recommending you, if you want to get by!"

"Whew!" says I. "Well, to be brutally frank with you, Benny, I got to eat. So I may as well take a chance on him. Where is his lair?"

"My old office!" says Benny sadly. "Such grief! Come back and tell me if you got any luck!"

Well, I flitted out and down the corridor like the ghost of my own hopes, and stopped outside the big carved teakwood door of poor Benny's old room, my heart in my mouth. The typewriter desk in the waiting room, which was usually occupied by the dentist assistant, was vacant, and there didn't seem to be nobody about. So after two or three moments alone I thought, oh, well, he can't eat me, and if I don't take a chance why maybe I will not even get to see him. So I give a knock on the teakwood, and almost at once a deep voice says "Come in."

Naturally I didn't hesitate, but pushed open the door and entered cautiously, so's to beat it quick on the least alarm.

The room was exactly the way it used to be in Benny's day, with the handsome furniture and all, and the enormous desk, only now the desk had papers on it—lots of them. There was only one person in the room, a man over by the window, and he was busy searching through a portfolio. As I come in he put this down and turned around.

It was Milton Sherrill.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE first thing I thought of as I looked at Milton was that once he had kissed me. You see if the truth be told, I had lately kept in the back of my mind what Anita used so often say to me about getting a friend to help you in the pictures. And while I had nothing definitely decided, I had the idea that maybe it would be necessary for me to do just a little vamping. I was pretty desperate, even for a woman, which it is a fact they get that way easier than the men do, and I simply had to find work.

Well anyways, that kiss which had occurred out on the top of the Sierra Mountains in the moonlight, come back to me the minute I set eyes on Milt, and with it the realization that here was my chance! He liked me. I would be half sold to him before I started, and if I could get him crazy about me, why who knows? But being a awful amateur on lines of that nature, I didn't hardly know how to commence.

"Oh, Mr. Sherrill!" I says. "It's you! And it's me! Don't you remember?"

"Remember?" says he, a big smile sweeping over his face like a light. "I'll say I do!"

Well this was a jolt, his using language like that, but of course he was in the pictures now. I thought I had better show my full realization of this, so I held out both hands.

"Well, well, Milt!" I says. "How's tricks? So you are working for the pictures!"

"Even so!" says he, grabbing my fingers and drawing me to the most comfortable chair. "Sit here," says he. "My word, but you look charming! Are you very rich and famous now?"

"Haven't you heard?" I says. "I am not McFadden any more. I'm Bonnie Delane."

"Great Scott, is that so?" says Milt with a whistle. "I know about you now, of course! I haven't seen either of the pictures, though, for I've been kept busy with technical details ever since I got here. But I'm going to run *The Mischief Makers* some evening soon. I understand that it is a great picture, and that you are a wonderful actress."

"Far be it from me to contradict such a statement," says I. "And maybe I'm not glad to see you! But I can't get over you being in the pictures! You, that had such a line of lowdown on them."

"I expect I exaggerated about that a bit," says Milt, settling himself beside me just like he used to in the observation car. "I, like most outsiders, hadn't realized the enormous possibilities in the industry. It's a wonderful game, but it is still in its infancy. My belief is that the artistic future of moving pictures has no limit! And let me tell you, we have made some of the finest pictures anyone could wish to see, right here on this lot. As for the business end—well, it leaves me speechless, that's all!"

"As bad as that?" says I.

"Bad? Who said bad?" demanded Milton, leaning

over and tapping me solemnly on the knee. "My dear girl, the moving picture business is colossal! True, it has been pretty carelessly managed in some cases, as for instance, right here, where old-fashioned, slipshod methods were in force. That's what I came to straighten out. My first intention was to remain a few weeks at most, but as I get into the thing and begin to see what could be done, I am very much inclined to stay on as financial head. I must say they have made me a very flattering offer. I haven't signed the contract yet, but I'm considering it."

"Sweet daddy!" I say feebly. "Is there a bug of some kind in the Hollywood air?"

"All we need in this business," Milt went on enthusiastically, "is the right sort of people. More and more are coming in every day. We must throw out the old traditions, which were established by a lot of clowns who were using the pictures very much as they would have run a shell game."

"I see," said I dryly, "that you know just what is wrong with the pictures. Most newcomers do."

Milton Sherrill laughed like a schoolboy and sprang to his feet, fetching and lighting a cigarette, and then coming back, pulling his chair closer to me.

"I say!" says he. "Don't laugh at me too unmercifully, I'm having such a lot of fun! For the first time in my life I am combining business and pleasure. And in the main I have the right dope about this game, Bonnie. May I call you that?"

"Sure you can!" says I, laughing. "I like it, Milt. It's plain you are really in up to your neck. And

maybe you do know something about what pictures need. You will, until you've been in them a while."

"Well, as I am a new broom I intend to sweep clean," says he. "I am going to rid this lot of the personal-pull idea, and favorites, and all that, and I have begun by hiring Austin Nickolls."

"Oh, I am glad," says I. "You couldn't help but like his work."

"So they tell me," says Milt. "I have not seen any of it yet, but this chap has become rather a friend of mine. He took me out to dinner when I was in New York, and we had several long talks together. I believe Nickolls is a wonderful director and that he has a big future! What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing!" says I. "I'm happy, that's all. And how about me, Milt? Do I get a job or are you prejudiced against me, on account of me being a old friend?"

"Not a bit, if you can act!" says he readily. "But we are not making anything just now. We are finishing the stuff which had already been started when I took the plant over, but we have not settled on our new productions."

Well, this was a blow because our grocer had already been told about as many of them forthcoming productions as he was interested in listening to, and I had a strong prejudice in favor of eating. I had come to land a contract and I had no intention to leave without it, so I made a move—over onto the arm of the big overstuffed where Milton was sitting.

"Oh, Milt!" I says pouting. "Put on something for me right away—please?"

"Now, Bonnie!" says Milt, not drawing away any, however.

"I know, but, hon," I says, "you see I was practically contracted for before you come out here. Benny Silvermount had been after me and said to come around any time. Couldn't you do it on that basis?"

"B. McFadden," says Milt, "desist! No, I can't!"

"Oh, Milt!" I says, and laid my cheek against his nice clean hair, and then all of a sudden I realized that this was no sacrifice, but probably the least difficult thing I had ever done in my whole entire life. At the thought I sprung away from him as quick as a cat, and at the instant Milt was on his feet, too, pacing up and down the room.

"Hey, you!" says he, like a thunderstorm. "Sit down in that chair!"

I sat down weakly, a rush of emotion making clear to me that whatever Milt was to tell me to do, why I would do it from that time on, world without end. Amen! I was glad and sorry and ashamed and proud, all at the same time. And I had started something. I'll say I had! Only not what I at first thought.

"You dear little idiot!" says Milt, stopping in front of me suddenly, and frowning. "So that is the way you think they do the trick, eh? No wonder pictures need reorganization! But it doesn't go here, child, nor with any of the big men in the business. When

will you pretty picture-struck girls realize that what the producer wants is talent? That he will always buy it at a fair price when he finds it? You don't have to do that sort of thing to me, or to anyone. You can act. That is enough. And, B. McFadden, as a vampire you are a rank amateur—thank God!"

He come over and kissed my hands quickly, and let them drop and started pacing again, while I just sat there and couldn't say a word.

"Women are all crazy!" he burst out after a minute. "I should think they could see that men in this business are absolutely fed up with silly women being thrown at their heads! I'm no Adonis, but, Bonnie, you are the tenth, in as many days! It's amazing!"

"But, Milt," I says, pretty nearly ready to cry, "you don't understand! I'm good, I can act, but I'm broke. I got to get work, and you said you wouldn't——"

"Oh, hush!" says he, never stopping his impatient walking. "Now I will have to make work for you! So you see your vamping was a success after all. I'll draw a contract of some kind this very afternoon, and give you an advance. You will begin working as soon as Nicky gets home. You need taking care of badly, B. McFadden, and I'm going to see that it is done."

Well, it's the truth that no matter how pure a lady is, she don't like to be scorned. And no modern girl gets any joy out of being told she can't take care of herself. Also it is a true fact that loving and hating act on a person very much the same way, and finding out that I loved Milton Sherrill naturally at once made

me as touchy as anything. I got on my feet as soon as he stopped talking.

"I seem to of managed to take pretty good care of myself this far," I says haughtily, "and can go on doing so. I don't think you need bother with any contract or anything. Good-by!"

"Hold on, B.," says Milton, putting his hand on my shoulder and making me sit down again. "Now that I have found you, I am not going to let you get away so easily. And you are going to stop behaving like a silly child and sign a contract at a reasonable figure—say, six hundred a week."

Well, as this was only one hundred berries more than I had ever got in my life I give a reluctant consent, and before I left the Silvermount that afternoon I had signed on the dotted line for three special Artlife productions, where I would not be a star by any means but would be one of Nicky's feature players, and also with a two weeks' advance in my purse, which I took with all the languid indifference of a starving hyena pouncing on a piece of raw meat.

But all this time Milt had not done one thing towards me, except what was real impersonal. And as I drove out home in the big white bus, which now was really going to be mine, it seemed to me like I was bound to be a business success; but a emotional failure. As soon as I fell in love with somebody they would get cold feet, or cuckoo over some other girl, and all my life it had been the same. There was Ella's brother back in the Stonewall Grammar School, who used to walk home with me and carry my books until I got

crazy about him and started giving him the cake out of my lunch box. Then he took up someone else. And there was a boy come with his family one summer to board out at the Bushwell farm. Mark Rowe, his name was, and he was sixteen and wild over me, until I told him I loved his eyes. Then he switched over to Ella. Then Stricky. And now Milton. On the other hand, there was dear old Bert Green, wild over me and I couldn't see him at all. And Axel, who any nitwit could tell was in love with me, while I only felt sorry for the poor good-looking boob. All the world loves another, as the old saying goes. And it didn't seem right.

Well, as I looked back I seen clearly that I had not really give a whoop for any of the lot until Milt, and I couldn't afford to lose him. I wouldn't. I would face the cruel truth which I had been aware of the other times but had never applied. I must not let Milt see how I felt. It was a darn-fool truth, but a truth just the same, that what a man can't have he wants, and so I would pull a can't-have, if it killed me. If Milt wanted to believe that I was just job-hunting when I vamped him, why so much the better. I give a sigh when I thought of it. Could I land him? I didn't know. All I knew for sure was that I had really been in love with him all my life.

When at last I got home, more in a state of fatigue than of triumph, there was mommer ahead of me, and of course tickled to death with my news.

"Why, Bonnie, dearie, I don't believe I could of done any better for you myself," she says. "When

I was Lila Lavelle's mother I always used to tell her 'A time will come when I can't teach you any more.' It looks like you were about there, hon, and I suppose before long you will be through with me!"

"Adele!" I says. "Oh, mommer, never! Why how can you say any such thing? I guess I will trouble you for a good many years yet!"

"I wouldn't call it trouble," says she with a pleased smile. "But I will say, honey, I am relieved you are signed up with such a good company. Mr. Sherrill is a rich banker, quite aside from the pictures, ain't he? And unmarried. H'm! Well, I suppose you will moan over that good-for-nothing nitwit of a Strickland, just the same. I hear he is perfectly devoted to Anita now."

Mommer stood with her hands on her hips, watching me, but attempting to register casual indifference. And it was all I could do to keep from laughing right out at her simple plotting. It was plain at such times why Adele's life ambition to be a picture actress had never come to anything. She could no more force a false expression than she could control a natural one, and believe me I did love her for it.

"Hon," says I, "don't you worry over my emotions. I got a job, that's enough to think about, ain't it? And as for Stricky, I haven't even got any desire to show him where he gets off. He is already off as far as I am concerned. But this I will say, and that is, some day he will make love that he don't mean once too often, and then he will get his."

"My land, I should hope so!" says mommer. And then she changed the subject quick. "Well," says she,

"I guess it's a good thing I was out to the ranch this afternoon. Your father hadn't washed the dishes in two days. That poor man is as helpless as a infant!"

"Mommer," I says severely, "you let him alone. He's got to learn to work and you must leave him learn it!"

"Well, all right," says Adele. "They say cast your bread upon the waters and you will find it after many days, but I always say a dish in time saves a nine day's plumber's bill; and that sink was something awful."

Well, I'll tell the world that the sink was not the only thing about our ranch that was in a fierce condition. I went out for a visit a coupla weeks after pop took possession, and pretty near dropped dead when I seen the place. At the first I just wouldn't go because I felt well here is pop, he never done a thing for me except sit on my neck and take my money, but well he is too old for me to change him, and so I will provide for him. But that will buy me the liberty to keep away from him. However, when he got so enthusiastic about ranching it, and moved out and everything, why a kind of hope did revive in me to the effect that perhaps he could actually make a go of it, for five acres is not a great deal to irrigate, and yet a mighty comfortable living can be taken off of them.

So when one day mommer says it is a shame the way you treat your poor father you had ought to go out and see him oncet in a while anyways, I give in to her, and mommer swiped a few magazines out of the parlor, a box of new electric bulbs, a coupla phonograph

records and other delicacies, and hid them on me in the car, and I didn't discover them until after we had got halfway out to the Arroyo del Rey, and it didn't seem worth while turning back.

Well, that made me a little sore, because it seemed to me she had taken pop pretty near everything in the house by then, and we might as well of moved out our trunks and been done. And when we come to the ranch itself, which by now it was less a ranch than the center of a new lot of cute art dwellings, I was even less glad. Of course I had not expected this ranch to be one always, and by now this development was quite an old district—more than five months old, in fact, and so of course it was being built up pretty fast, but still and all that shouldn't of affected pop's trees like it had. As we come in sight of them I give a gasp, for the ground was cracked and dry, with weeds springing up in it, showing plainly that no cultivation had been even attempted. As for the fruit, heaven knows a olive whether in or out of a cocktail, means nothing personally to me, but I hate to see even a caraway seed wasted, and these olives were. They was dried up like Egyptian ones, or something, and the whole place had a look of being run down. Very extra conspicuous it seemed, among all that grand California real-estate enterprise, conducted by Californians from Pennsylvania.

Pop was not expecting us, for he was busy sitting on the front porch with his boots off, and his stockings, with his feet in them, however, on the rail, and he was squeezing the last drop of reading matter out of

the morning paper, which showed considerable conservation because this was the middle of the afternoon. There certainly was some things pop could make go a long ways.

"Well, Bonnie, dearie!" he says, delighted, when we stopped outside. "Welcome, pretty daughter, to my humble home."

"Humble is right, pop," I says, coming up on the porch and leaving him present me with one of them generous kisses of his. "I might of known you would humble it! What's the big idea of leaving things go this way?"

"Daughter dear," says pop with great dignity, "that is a fine way to speak, and you neglecting me all this while! It's true this is no palace, but it's my own, and my warm welcome ought to compensate for its shortcomings!"

I sunk down in a chair and looked around me with a heavy disgust. From a pretty but neglected ranch it had grown to be a pigsty! Even in spite of Adele's efforts to the contrary.

"Pop," I says, "what ails you? I thought you was full of enthusiasm for this job?"

"Tush, darling, that's where I was all wrong!" says pop, smiling again. "Ye see it was a terrible piece of work, getting all them damn trees watered, and plowed, and what not! My back itself was near broke before the first day was out. And then, when I come to figure what would I get off them at the very best, why it wouldn't be the fortune I want to make for you, dearie. So I set myself to find out how would I do bet-

ter with the property, and I been figuring on that ever since."

"Is that so?" says I indignantly. "Well, I hope you got something settled by now, because the looks of this place is a disgrace, and it was given to me for the advertising! Believe me, when I start work on Nicky's new picture next week the real-estate interests out here will commence using this for publicity again, and, sweet daddy, what will they say?"

"That's so, daughter dear," says pop with a troubled look in his big blue eyes. "What a pity, now! Of course the place is mine, since you gave it to me, but they will pass remarks, none the less, no doubt. What will we do about it? You make a suggestion, Bonnie, and I will act on whatever you tell me to."

Well, it had been quite some time since I had been obliged to think up a new line for pop, and so it didn't take me long to hit on a idea.

"I'll tell you what," says I—"you get in with the Arroyo bel Rey people, and cut this place up into half-acre lots and sell them for building, all but your own house. And with the money you get, buy your way into the development company."

"Why, that's a grand idea!" says pop, brightening at once. "All I would have to do is mark off the corners of the lots with pegs and then sit in the office and wait for the customers. There's fine money to be made in real estate, Bonnie, and I think we have hit on the right idea at last!"

Well, I thought maybe, but said nothing, and just then mommer come out from the kitchen with a pot

of coffee and some cake, and I recognized my best china cups on the tray. But I wouldn't say a word about that, because soon I myself would be hard at work, so why not spend as happy an afternoon as is possible with one's family? As things turned out, it was a long time before I seen either pop or the ranch again. I was glad afterwards to remember we had parted friends.

"Au revoir, dear!" I says when I left, kissing him of my own accord.

"Same to you!" says pop. And that is the last I seen of him until after what I am now going to tell you about happened.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN Nicky come back from New York it was the breath of my artistic career to me. Of course I had seen a lot of Milt—that is, considering how busy he was—but while Milt was my heart, Nicky was my art, and that is the curse of we modern women; there has got to be so many kinds of men in our life, and our tradition to the contrary, makes us fight that true fact, and troubles us a lot.

But while I felt it kind of queer in me to be so glad to see Nickolls when I was all the time deeply in love with Milt, yet I was made that way, and to celebrate his return we had a party out to my house with Milt and Bert and Axel and Benny Silvermount and Trixie and Jennie, her kid, and we ate our lunch out in the garden, and had a talk fest about how good we all was, and what a great future was before us and so forth.

“Thank God for this, his country!” says Nicky, leaning back in his chair and sniffing at the blue sky. “Give me the Coast and you can have New York!”

“I thought you was crabbing about our immoral community just before you went East,” I says, kidding him, see? “And that you never wanted to work out here again, but stay in the wholesome stimulating cold of winter slush, and so forth?”

“Huh!” says Nicky, shaking his big lion’s head. “Huh! I’ve been East since then!”

Well, this picture, the first one Nicky was to make, might of been called a kind of a experiment. It sure had some cast. Trixie Trueman, Bonnie Delane, Tom Wells, Herman Herman, the famous he-beauty, and Atlas, the strong guy. Nobody starred, but everybody featured, and Milt had worked out the paper for it such a way that nobody could get sore. He was having all the names printed on the same line, and alphabetically.

Well, the script of this piece was by a bird named Hawthorne and was called The Scarlet Letter. You see Nicky had got the idea to make some American classics, and not to change them any, but attempt merely to amplify the books for screen purposes and make only such changes as was absolutely necessary to have them go in the small towns. And Milt backed him up strong, in spite of Big Benny, who stood around and tore his hair, or would of only he was prematurely bald and really couldn't spare it. But he tore a cloth hat one time, when they says they was going to keep the original title. So then they saw not alone what was left of the hat, but reason as well. and changed the name of the picture to The Price of Sin.

But when it come right down to the story itself, Nicky would not give in one inch. He claimed he would make this great American novel the way it was written, and if it was part of a person's education to read it, why not make it the same as it read? Of course he realized that on account of the censors he would be obliged to make the heroine, Hester, married in secret to the father of her child, because other-

wise it would not be possible to show the picture. And a part was written in for me—a Spanish dancer that tried to vamp the juvenile away from Hester. But outside of that the story was practically the way the author had written it.

Well, we had been working on this picture for over two weeks and things was going unusually well. Milton had hired Joe for Nicky's camera, on Nicky's recommendation, and undoubtedly Joe was a wonderful camera man. Also Milt was glad to hire Bert Green for stills, because of course Bert was an old friend from his own home town of Stonewall. Slim Rolf was back with us, too, Big Benny pointing out that he was the one best bet for publicity and besides, he, Benny, had known Slim for years. So we were a happy family once more, and I'll say the picture looked like it was certainly going to be a knockout. And then one day we run against a awful snag.

You see this Hester in the story, she has a baby, and really if you was to cut it out there would be no story to it. But it seems the Big Egg got to thinking it over and talked with Milton about it, and told Milton what a serious thing it was to run up against the National Board of Censorship and that many a expensive fillum had been made and then they had to throw it out because of just some little thing like that. Well, it seems that Milton pointed out to Benny that Hester was married, and that the both of them had been born once, and Benny had to admit it, but thought they had better consult Nicky before they went any further. So they sent for Nicky and after two hours he come out boiling,

but licked, parked himself in my light-blue silk dressing room and exploded, for he knew that was a safe place to do it.

"They make me wild!" he bellowed. "They are mad as hatters! Change *The Scarlet Letter*? Good Lord, haven't they changed it enough already? Benny suggested that I get Hester into some business complication as a substitution for her child! Heaven defend us!"

"But, Nicky," I says to him, "it isn't Benny that's to blame; it's them censors! Gee! Sometimes when I think of anybody telling me what I can or can't see, it makes me so wild, Nicky, I could blow up!"

"Oh, they are probably good enough as people," says he. "But nobody is good enough to tell an artist in any line what work he shall do or how it shall be done. Let them take or leave the finished product, by all means, Bonnie. But allow the public itself to judge of moral values, and of decency! I for one have great faith in the intelligence of my fellow countrymen and women. If a show is dirty they can be pretty safely trusted not to accept it. They will simply call in the police, and that will put an end to it."

"Well, I personally myself don't see how anybody can be conceited enough to accept the job of censoring," I says thoughtfully. "Yet you got to admit, Nicky, that in the old days there was some pretty raw pictures shown."

"But they didn't last!" says he, quick. "They were withdrawn at the first public protest. And anyhow, that was in the old days when pictures were a wildcat

enterprise. And now—Why, the darn thing doesn't work anyhow, no matter how you look at it. For example, remember that German picture? A crazy man's mind, exposed most realistically. Yet it gets by the censors while my own company, an American concern, is afraid to let me faithfully film a great American classic by one of the greatest writers our country has produced—all because the most common event in life, with the exception of death, occurs in it. Bah!"

"But, Nicky, Nicky!" I says. "Some control has got to be put on everything. Otherwise we would get a lot of awful books and pictures and so forth. I wish I had the faith in the good sense and inborn decency of people that you got. But I can't have it, Nicky. I lived in a small country village too long."

"What?" says he indignantly. "Why, with the amount of education there is in this country to-day the people are perfectly competent to act as their own censors."

"And there are also a lot of nitwits that will pay out good money to get hold of a little dirt," I reminded him.

"But what I am making in *The Scarlet Letter* isn't dirt, you ignorant child!" Nicky shouted at me. "It's life—it's life, I tell you; and life isn't dirty. But a lot of boobs who are permitted to judge haven't found out the distinction as yet!"

"The picture-going public, Nicky," I says, "is much like a classroom in an old-fashioned public school. The big majority are kept back by the few. You can't

safely promote the class until the nitwits have caught up a little with the normal kids."

"You said a mouthful," retorted Nickolls grimly, "and that without knowing it. It is just as wrong to hold back a normal audience from an adult representation of life through the medium of art, as it was to keep back your roomful of normal children on account of the presence among them of some who were sub-normal. We can't go on forever making pictures primarily for old maids and for children! We can make separate pictures for them, yes, but we must grow up. It's time."

"Sweet daddy!" says I. "If it wasn't for the old maids and the sweet young things there wouldn't be no business for the movies! And what is more, J. Austin Nickolls, I got a very clear idea that art can be made out of some subject which nobody can take any exceptions to, just as easy as it can out of the other kind of thing, and that it can be just as first-class art, too, if you are artist enough to make it right. So why not simplify matters by choosing that kind of a story, and then everybody will be satisfied?"

Nicky give me a long stare at that, and got up.

"No wonder you are a success in the pictures!" he says.

And without another word he walked away, leaving me to wonder was that remark a compliment or a insult?

However, in the end the office decided to take a chance on the censors and left Hester Prynne's baby in the story, but decided they would cut out the con-

ventional shot showing Hester holding up a darling little pair of knitted boots. So Nicky forgave Benny and Milt, and recommenced work on the picture instead of walking out on them and jumping in the ocean to drown himself, like he had announced he would.

And then, just as things had got settled down again and was running smoothly, there come a interruption of another kind which lamed the production for quite some time.

They say that coming events cast their shadows before them, but I always say you never know what the morrow will bring forth—to steal mommer's stuff. And in this case it wasn't even a case of the morrow, but a mere matter of a few hours.

Well, this day things had started out good, with perfect weather, a perfect breakfast, the car running fine, and practically no bills in the morning's mail. My make-up went on right the very first time, and I was singing to myself when I went down on the set. Everybody I met seemed like they was in a good humor, too, and the work went well all morning. Talk about casting a shadow before, why this event I am going to tell you about didn't cast any more shadow than a split hair! I don't remember when I felt so light-hearted. Even mommer's telephoning at lunch time to say she was coming down later and watch me work didn't upset me like it usually done.

Well anyways, things were fine, even if Nicky himself was not on the set this day, but leaving the stuff to Louie.

"Say, Louie," I says when we went back to the stage

after our noon diet—"Say, Louie, where is Nicky gone, do you know?"

"I don't know, unless he's staying home, sore," says Louie with a grin. "Maybe he don't feel so good after that jam he was in last night."

"What jam is that?" I says.

"Didn't you hear about it?" says Louie. "Why, it's all over town. It was with your old friend Greg Strickland."

"What was it, Louie?" I says, trying not to seem as nervous as I felt.

"Well, as far as I can make out, see," says Louie, "this Strickland had it in for Nicky, see, and last night they were both to a party out at Atlas Smith's place. Well, Strickland had some wren along and they were both pretty wet, I guess. Anyways, Nicky met up with them in the garden on that little Jap-bridge effect Atlas has over his swimming pool. And when Nick seen who it was coming towards him over this bridge, see, why he steps to one side to avoid speaking, and Strickland seen his chance and without any warning, why he soaks Nicky one in the jaw and Nicky fell over and landed in the pool."

"Well, there was a big crowd around, see?" Louie went on. "And they got Nicky right out. His head was hurt pretty bad by striking on the edge of the pool, but he was all for licking Strickland good and plenty, just the same."

"And did he?" says I.

"Naw!" says Louie. "Strickland didn't stay long

enough for him to. By the time Nick was out of the pool that bad actor had left the party without even saying good night."

"Whew," I says. "I will have to call Nicky up when we quit this afternoon."

"It's a poor way to get a bad head," says Louie; "and I'll bet his is aching!"

Well, after that we went back to the big scene we was shooting, which was of Plymouth Rock or some place, and my mind was at once on my job again, the way it always is when I am acting. In the sequence we was making I was this Spanish dancer that was vamping Herman, our juvenile, who was playing the part of this young clergyman. So naturally I kind of forgot Nicky and everything else for a while. And then in the middle of the afternoon Louie decided he would shoot the same stuff in another background as well, so that there would be two choices in tomorrow's dailies. Consequently there was a wait while an interior was dressed for him, and during it I was chatting with Trixie when Eddie the w. k. call boy came and says that I was wanted on the telephone.

"Say, how do you get that way?" I says. "I'm on the set, ain't I?"

"I know," says he, kind of upset for him, "but it's real urgent, I think, Miss Delane, or I wouldn't of come for you."

Well, I took a look around, and as things didn't seem as if they would be ready for some little time yet, why, I says to Trixie, wait, dear, I will be right back

and tell you the rest about how that new coat of mine is going to be made, and then I went to my dressing room and picked up the receiver of the telephone.

"Hello!" I says. "This is me speaking. Who is it, please?"

At first all I could hear was a sort of confused sound, like someone crying. And then I made out my name.

"Yes, it's me!" I says. "Who wants me?"

"Come quickly!" says the voice. A woman's, I could get that now.

"Mommer, is it you?" I says frightened.

"It is Anita," says the voice. "Bonnie, say you will come. You must, you must!"

Well, when I heard who it was I went kind of cold all over me. The iron nerve of her, to call me up at all, much less ask me to do anything for her!

"I can't go anywheres," I says. "I am on a set. And if I wasn't I don't see how you could expect me to come, Anita, after everything!"

"Bonnie, Bonnie!" she wailed. "You must come! Something terrible has happened, and you are the only friend I got in the world."

"I can't," I says. "I tell you I am working. I got to go right back."

"You must come!" says Anita, and there was a terrible sound to her voice as she said it. "Nothing is so important as your coming. I've got to have help."

"But what's wrong?" I says. "Tell me, and I'll try and get over later."

"I can't tell you on the phone," says she. "Oh, come, please, please!"

"Where are you?" I says.

"I'm at Stricky's bungalow. Oh, I'm going mad, I tell you. If you wait any longer it will be too late. Can't you understand—too late! Come, Bonnie, you must, you must!"

She started laughing and crying then and I suppose dropped the receiver. I could still hear her faintly, but she had evidently left the phone. And then somebody screamed. Such a scream as I hope I will never hear again—thin and high and despairing and full of fear. Then no sound at all.

I stood at that phone with a sensation like I simply must see through it to what was happening at the other end, my heart beating like I'd been running a race. There could be no fake about what I had just heard, that was sure. A sort of wild fear took hold of me.

What was wrong? What crazy unbelievable thing had happened? The sinister something that was forever fighting the beauty around me crept out of its hiding place again and breathed its foul breath on me. My nerves shrank away from the horror of it, and yet there had been a tone in Anita's voice which forced me in the other direction. It was just woman calling to woman. More than that, it was a human in need calling out in despair to the only one it could think of—myself! I had to answer it. I had to go!

It's the truth that from that moment on I forgot the studio where I was, forgot the people waiting on the set, the work I was due to do there, and absolutely everything except that terrible haunting cry of Anita's. It wiped out even the recollection of how she had

double-crossed me, and all I thought of was that I positively must get to her as quick as ever I could.

The idea of waiting to take off my Spanish costume or my make-up never even come into my head as I rushed for the open door, down the long narrow flight of stairs, across a couple of empty stages, headed for the main door, and nearly knocking Slim Rolf over in the corridor as I ran out. He yelled some indignant remark at me, I don't know what, for I paid no attention, but ran along the street to where my car was parked at the extreme end of the crowded line. At last I reached it, and somehow in another minute I was headed away from the studio, my lace headdress flying and flapping about me madly in the wind.

Stricky's bungalow was on a old street way over on the edge of the West Adams district, a well built-up neighborhood and exclusive, but the homes not very close together. The house itself was a simple little one of the old original California-bungalow type, and had been put up when they made them of brown stained shingles, and it had a heavy old buginwillæa vine hanging dark and thick over the porch. When I parked my car in front of it there was not a soul in sight, and I thought my! how still and quiet it is! The only thing moving anywheres was the sprayer playing quietly on the lawn with a soft, wet, drippity-drop as it swung around.

I went up the path with fast-beating heart, wondering at the unearthly quiet that hung about the place, and the late afternoon sun sent my fantastic shadow scuttling ahead of me as I run up the steps. The front

door was standing wide open, and after kind of halting on the door-sill I went in and stopped in the hall.

"Anita! Anita!" I called, my own voice sounding like a stranger to me.

But there was no answer. Not even a sound. So taking all my courage in my hands I parted the curtains and went into the sitting room. At first I thought there was nobody in it, but after a moment my eyes grew accustomed to the dimness and I seen that I was wrong. Somebody was there. It was Stricky, spread face downwards on the floor, and beside him lay Nickolls' revolver.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHO had killed Gregory Strickland? That was the first question flashed into my mind as I stood there in the doorway of his parlor, holding on to the portières and staring down at his body.

The room itself looked like a storm or something had wrecked it and undoubtedly a emotional one had. The center table was overturned and the lamp smashed on the floor, also a vase with spilled flowers and a coupla torn magazines. Two chairs was upset, the rug was rumped, and partially on it but with his still face against the parquet, lay Strick, his arms sprawled out and his handsome Jap kimono all twisted about him in a way that would of been comical if it hadn't been so ghastly. My throat was terrible dry and with a sort of crick in it, and for the first moment or two I couldn't make no noise at all. Then finally my voice come back to me and I managed to let out a cry.

"Anita!" I screamed. "Oh, Anita, where are you? What has happened?"

But nobody answered. Well, I thought, maybe she has fainted or something and no wonder, for I then remembered things had sounded that way over the telephone, and so I started out to see could I find her any place. It took a lot of nerve to let go of the curtains and walk around Greg but somehow I done it, and reached the dining room beyond. Nobody was there, either, only a table where two had eaten evidently

a late combination breakfast and lunch, and the coffee was in the cups yet and a used napkin on the floor where somebody getting up had dropped it. The pantry was empty, too, and there was no one in the kitchen, although I knew that generally Strick kept a Jap servant. Somehow it made me feel awful queer to see these simple domestic items all as per usual while that thing lay in the room beyond. I found I was walking quiet, though swift, as I went into the hall again and paused outside the door to Stricky's bedroom, which was the only other room in the house.

It was a hard thing to do, opening that door, for I dreaded to think what state Anita would be in, but I opened it just the same, calling to her again. But this room, too, was perfectly empty, with the bed rumpled like Strick had got up late and a few of his clothes was laying about. That was all. The top bureau draw was open and handkerchiefs and collars was scattered about. The wind, that soft California wind with the oil and the cedar and the burning eucalyptus leaves in it, stirred the bright yellow curtains at the open window and they was the only things moving in the whole entire house.

For what seemed to be about a year I stood there thinking where was Anita? Where had she gone? Was it she who had killed Greg, or had he done it his own self? And why? If he had committed suicide, why should she of run away before I got there? I couldn't make it out. Of course she might of gone for the police, but that didn't seem hardly likely, what with a telephone right in the house. Whatever had been

pulled off, her nerve had lasted long enough to let her get me on the wire, which made it seem as if some third party had been present when she phoned. That must of been it! She had certainly said it would be too late if I didn't come at once. Yes, someone else had most likely been in the bungalow at that time, and the murder had been going on while she was phoning. But who could that third party of been, and why should I especially be drawn into it?

Suddenly it come over me with full force whose shooting iron that was on the parlor floor. It was Nicky's! I crept back to the parlor to make absolutely sure there was no mistake. Yes, it was the gun I had used in *Alias Cinderella*, and which Greg had stolen from me later. I remembered how Nicky had asked for it and said it was his father's and so forth. Not a doubt was in my mind but that he had made Greg return it. And then there was that trouble the two of them had out at Atlas Smith's party. There must of been more to the incident than I knew of. Oh, it was awful, too awful!

But what was I to do? The first person I thought of calling was Adele. I must have mommer at once, for I needed her something awful. By now she was probably at the studio, and I could get her there. The telephone stood on a little table just beyond where Stricky lay, and I was forced to pass him again to get it. Somehow I couldn't endure to touch him, even to change his dreadful position or cover him up. How I felt about him lying there I don't hardly know, except that he was unreal yet terrible.

The receiver was hanging off the telephone just like Anita had dropped it, and before I could get Central I had to put it back on the hook for a while and wait, and believe me I sat pretty near as quiet as my companion. Then at last I got the operator and a moment or two later the studio answered.

"Silvermount Studios," says girl's voice with a deadly commonplace tone that jarred on my nerves.

"Is that you, Mabel?" I says shakily. "This is Miss Delane speaking. Is mommer on the lot?"

"Sure, Miss Delane," says Mabel cheerfully. "She come in a minute ago."

"Say get this right, Mabel," I says. "I am at Mr. Strickland's bungalow. Get word at once to mommer to come right out here as fast as she can. Tell her something serious is wrong. Get her immediately, even if you have to leave the board yourself. It's life and death. Do you understand?"

"My Gawd, yes!" says she.

"Hurry, Mabel," I says.

Then I hung up and sat there trembling, not knowing just what to do next, and as I sat that way I heard somebody come up the path and cross the porch. At the sound I come to life and to my feet. Anita! It must be her, come back. I flew to the window and peeked out between the curtains and saw that it was not Anita after all, but a policeman, and at the same instant he rung the doorbell.

I drew back into the room trying to think quick, and as I done so I noticed that gun again and realized that probably nobody but mommer and me knew whose it

was. With one motion I had it in my hand, and was looking around wildly to see where I could hide it. Then the doorbell rung again, and that decided me. I hid the gun down the front of my waist, and with it pressing against my body, cold and painful, I went to open the door.

Outside on the porch stood a handsome young cop and his smiling face took on a look of surprise when he seen me and that reminded me I was in my Spanish costume all this while.

"Say!" says this cop in a pleasant voice. "You got your car parked the wrong way. You can't leave it like that, miss!"

Whatter you know! I pretty near died of the shock of this remark. Here I was all keyed up for Gawd knew what, and he pulled a line like that on me. I leaned up against the door frame and commenced to laugh and cry, and for a moment he just stood and stared at me like I had gone cuckoo and guess I had, a little bit. Then I controlled myself. After all, the sight of him was a relief.

"Oh, officer!" I says, gasping and reaching out to him. "I am glad it's you. Someone is killed, inside!"

"What?" says he. "Are you kidding or what?"

"No, no!" I cried. "It's Gregory Strickland! Come in, please! Oh, thank God, you come!"

Well, he didn't stop to argue then, but brushed past me and into the room where I pointed. On the door-sill he stopped and give a whistle.

"Merciful Mother!" says he. Then he done what

I had not dared to do. He went over to Strick and turned his head and felt his hands. Then he straightened up and faced me, looking quite another person from the boy I had just let in.

"He's warm yet!" he says. "It must of just happened. What did you do it for?"

The room went spinning around me at them words. What had I killed Greg for—I! Up to that moment it hadn't even come into my head that anybody would think I was the murderer. And now I seen the fix I was in. I suppose I pretty near fainted, but not quite. There come a moment of terrible confusion to my mind, and then somehow I was sitting on the sofa and the cop was holding a glass of water to my lips.

"There now!" says he. "You'll be all right. Just set quiet and don't you attempt to move while I call up headquarters!"

"I didn't do it!" I says feebly. "I tell you I didn't do it!"

"Who did, then?" says he.

"I don't know," I gasped.

"Well," says the officer grimly, "you'll get plenty of chance to explain to a jury how you happened to be here!"

He grabbed up the telephone and commenced talking, while I sat limp where he had put me, too dazed by all I had been through to attempt to move, even if there had been no gun trained at me, which there by now was, for the cop had pulled his out.

"Shooting!" he says into the receiver giving the address. "Looks like a murder. Spanish woman. Yeh,

I'm holding her all right. Better send an ambulance as well. All right, captain!" Then he turned back to me, his face as hard as nails.

"Mighty rotten business," he says. "Movie folks, ain't you? I thought as much! Rotten lot, I always say they are. Well, I guess this will be about the end of the wild times for a couple of youse, now!"

I couldn't answer, for my voice was gone again. And anyways, my mind was on other matters besides setting a mere typical bonehead right against his will, because even in these extreme circumstances my brains hadn't gone back on me to such a extent but that I could see he was just that, although I couldn't hardly blame him for thinking like he did about my guilt.

Neither could I help but see that I was in a very bad fix. Being found alone with a dead body, especially one belonging to a person with who you are known to have a quarrel, is no joke at any time. Of course I had been at the studio up to half an hour ago, but then on the other hand I had left it without notice to anybody and in a very peculiar way. Nobody, not even Eddie the callboy, knew who it was had wanted me on the phone that time, and it begun to look like unless Anita come back pretty pronto, I was going to be out of luck. But then I remembered that perhaps Anita herself had killed Strick and in that case the police station was not where she would head for, but quite to the contrary, because from what I knew of Anita she was not the type of girl to give herself up, but was far more likely to give a friend up, and it begun more clearly every

minute to look like that was exactly what she had done to me.

Of course the guilty one might still be Nickolls, for he and Strick had lots of reason for a quarrel, while Anita and Strick was sweeties. All this and a plenty more kept pouring through my head in a confused stream while I and the officer waited for what seemed like hours, but which, by the clock on the mantel, was actually less than twenty minutes. However, under such a circumstance as I was in, why a person gets a chance to go over their whole past and I did, including how a McFadden was never before arrested as far as I knew, and what an end to come to after working like I done all my life, and so forth, and I'll say my courage was pretty well gone by the time a couple cars stopped out in front.

Well, when I heard these two cars stop, one right after the other, why naturally I made a dash for the window, and then I felt the arm of the law in reality, for the cop's arm caught mine and he threw me back onto the sofa in a way made me realize for fair that I was now no lady but a mere prisoner.

"Cut that, now!" he says. "The crowd will see you soon enough!"

Well, of course it wasn't the mob I wanted to see or the detectives either, and I don't know where the crowd come from, but it was the truth that right on the heels of the cops a few people had at once gathered around. I could hear them talking and making remarks, and over all Adele's voice as she told the police just where they got off, and why.

"Hey! You will so let me right in!" says mommer, high and firm. "I tell you my daughter is in there and she telephoned me to come. Prisoner nothing! I'll see her at once. You just get out of my way afore I have to push you out and you have to arrest the both of us!"

Oh, but her words was music in my ears! And the sight of her as she burst into that room was like a rampant angel or something.

"Oh, mommer, mommer!" I cried, and in another instant I fell in her arms.

She held me fast and courage come flowing back to my heart even if I was at the same time crying it out on her shoulder. How wonderful she was! Her daughter! She claimed me for it, even in a circumstance like that! The thought give me strength to get myself together and act a little more like a human being and less like a guilty party.

"What is all this about?" says mommer, patting my head and glaring at the inspectors who followed her in, over the top of it. "Strickland murdered? Good Gawd! Well, it certainly served him right and he had it coming to him, but my Bonnie had nothing to do with it, I'll tell you right now!"

"Deserved it, did he, eh?" says the inspector, going over and giving a look at Strick, but not touching him. "Perhaps your daughter has a grudge against him, Mrs.—eh, what name?"

"Delane!" says mommer. "Mrs. Delane and this is Miss Bonnie Delane, the famous star."

"Whew!" says the inspector. "Is that correct?"

Well, I've always heard you picture people lived a wild life. What did you say this man's name was? Strickland? What made you think he deserved such a finish, eh?"

"Because he was a no-good lowlife!" says mommer hotly. Then she caught my eye and stopped short. Altogether too short, as I could see from the inspector's face. "That is," she went on, "they say he had a bad reputation."

"And yet your daughter is found here under most peculiar circumstances," says he. "H'm!" Then he turned to me, "Did you do it?" he says like a shot out of a gun.

"No!" I says. "I knew him a long time, and I wasn't friends with him. But I didn't do it. I come here on a hurry call over the telephone and found it— it already done."

"Did he call you?" says the cop.

"No," says I. "A woman did. Anita Lauber."

"H'm!" says he again, plainly not believing me one scrap.

Then he commenced walking around the room, looking for something. My heart come up in my throat as I watched, and began beating there to such a extent that I could hardly breathe. All of a sudden the inspector stopped walking in front of the young cop, the first one, and shot him a remark.

"Where is the weapon, Brady?" he says. The young Irishman opened his eyes very wide.

"Why, I don't know, sir!" says he. "I don't remember seeing any!"

"That's a hell of a note!" says his superior, real mad. "What were you doing all the time I was on my way out? The man didn't die without cause. He was shot. The gun didn't walk away. Search the woman!"

I shrunk back against Adele when he said that. I felt that if any of them touched me I would die. I couldn't stand it. If they was to look me over they would get it anyways, so why not volunteer and save myself the mortification? Thinking this I put my hand down the front of my dress and pulled out Nicky's gun. It was the only thing to do.

"Here it is!" I says. "I picked it up from the floor when I come in."

"Aha! I thought as much!" says the inspector, his face lighting up with satisfaction, and reaching out for the gun. I let him take it and he slipped it into his pocket. "I am much obliged, Miss Delane," says he. "A very simple case, this, as I see it. Jealousy, I suppose. Will you come along quietly? I assure you it will be far better for all of us if you will."

I nodded dumbly, and patted Adele on the hand, for she had commenced to cry.

"It's all right, mommer," I says. "I am not guilty and they can't hurt me any. Wait and see."

"Guilty?" says mommer between sobs. "I should say not! Why, mister, that gun is merely a stage one and belongs to Austin Nickolls, her director. He loaned it to her."

"Well, she seems to of made considerable use of it!" says he.

"I tell you I didn't!" I says wildly. "I never fired it but once in my life and that was in a picture!"

Well, just as I had shrieked this out we heard a bell clanging down the street, and outside the door the by now quite large crowd set up a murmuring and so forth, and it was the ambulance at last, and pretty soon in come the doctor, and still another cop was with him.

"Hello, Faulk!" says this newcomer. "Hello, Brady. What's up?" Then he seen Strickland, and next myself, standing between a spare cop or so, and mommer. His eyes like all the rest, nearly bulged out at my clothes.

"Phew!" says he. "Little side show from Mexico, eh? Well, let's see how much damage the lady did!"

That was the most awful part of all, the way everybody took for granted that I was guilty. The doc went at once in the same casual way over to Stricky, and knelt down beside him. I closed my eyes as he leaned over and commenced to turn the body around. The room went black to me and there was a moment of deathly silence. And then there come a strange sound. It was a full moment before my brain registered what that sound meant. And then in a mad rush of understanding I knew.

Stricky had moaned.

"Good Lord!" says the inspector. "Then he's not dead?"

"Not in the least," says the glorious, handsome wonderful young doctor in accents like magic. "It's hard to kill these picture hams—they are a tough lot. He's had a bad blow on the head. Very likely hit it on the

table when he fell. He's been shot in a couple of places all right, but they don't amount to much. He'll be around in a day or two, and able to start suit to his heart's content!"

Over the clamor that arose then come Adele's voice, strong and clear as a steam whistle.

"If Stricky ain't dead, then you can't hold Bonnie!" she yelled, her old capable self once more.

"Yes, we can," says the inspector sharply, like a lion cheated of his prey. "We must make sure that he will live. I shall have to make an arrest. Sorry, Mrs. Delane, but it can't be helped. The evidence is too strong, and we don't allow folks to go around shooting up the town, you know!"

Well, that was a body blow again, but in comparison to what five minutes ago I had thought I was up against, it was a mere nothing! Stricky was groaning good and healthy as they carried him out to the ambulance, and I had great hopes. And considering he had been cheated of a first-class Spanish-American murder by a hair's breadth the inspector acted real nice, because he let us all go to court in my own car instead of the black Maria. And to tell the truth even court listened well to me in comparison to that awful bungalow and the horrors of the past hour.

I don't know have you ever been in court—that is, as a prisoner. But if ever you have you will appreciate how different a place like that looks to a near-convict from the time a person goes there merely to look on and say ain't crime disgusting and thank Gawd I am not in that class and so forth the way some people

do. And if a person is at all sensitive, why after once being innocent but hauled before a police captain which is where we was hauled, why they will in future for the rest of their life feel hesitating about looking over even the animals in a zoo, because who knows but they got minds and can suffer the same as we?"

Well, no sensitive-plant in any botanical garden had anything on me for misery when I stood up before the captain and told my story about Anita and Strick and how she had phoned me and so forth. But somehow I went through with it. I did it as brave and quiet as I could even when Nicky's gun was brought out of his pocket by the inspector and laid on the desk in front of the captain.

"So this belongs to Austin Nickolls, does it?" says the captain. "A fine chap—I met him once. Didn't I hear some talk about a row at Atlas Smith's place last night? Where is Nickolls, anyhow?"

"Please, I think he is at home," I says. "If he had anything to do with this, Your Honor, he would be the first to report it his own self!"

"I believe you!" says the captain. "Say, Brady, just see if you can get a line on Nickolls, will you? Telephone his house!"

Well, this Brady he went away to do like he was told, and mommer went to another booth to call the studio and get Milton Sherrill, for the captain was a good scout and a fan of mine and Nicky's and says well he guessed he could let me go out on bail if it was big enough, and of course Milt was the financial man to do it. And also some officers then went off to see could

they locate Anita any place, and for another long dreadful spell of endless minutes all I could do was sit still and wait and wonder.

When I thought of Milton Sherrill and the errand which he would presently come here on, I wished that I was dead, or at least could somehow die before he saw me, or rather before I seen the coldness which must surely come on his face when he found me a jail bird, or practically the same thing. Whatever I had hoped and dreamed of for the future, as far as it concerned Milt, why that was all over now. I was disgraced in his eyes beyond any hope, because believe me Milt didn't seem the kind of man who would ever think of marrying a person who had been arrested on a charge of the kind that I had been. And while I never for one moment doubted but that he would come at once and go on my bail, and so forth, why the newspapers would hardly keep my secret, and he would put me out of his mind as far as serious intentions went, because of course his wife would have to be without a reproach, even a false one. It was realizing this wiped all hope out for me, and now that my future life was ruined, why I wasn't sure but that it would be a whole lot happier for all concerned if I could be hanged for Strick's murder after all.

Well, in a police court time don't hang heavy on a person's hands, at least not if they are the prisoner and things keep developing in the way of evidence. And just as I had got so low in my mind that if I had got any lower I would of been sunk entirely, why in comes Brady with news to the effect that John Austin Nick-

olls was not only out but he hadn't been home for the last twenty-four hours, and his car hadn't been home, either.

"That looks bad!" says the captain briskly, in the horrid way a person naturally does when it is their business to hope for the worst. "Here Nickolls has a fight with Gregory Strickland, and the next thing we know, Strickland is found unconscious in his home, with two gun wounds in him made by Nickolls' revolver, and Nickolls has vanished without a word!"

Well, we was all on our feet by then, I'll tell the world, our eyes glued to the police captain as he talked with relish. And because of this, why we didn't notice anybody new had come in until a voice behind me interrupted.

"How do you know those shots were fired from Nickolls' gun?" says the voice, very clear and quiet.

I turned around, trembling all over, and there was Milton Sherrill. It was him who had spoke. Then he pointed at the gun, which still lay on the captain's desk where the inspector had put it.

"Has anybody taken the trouble to break that gun?" Milt went on.

There was a half moment of surprised chatter before the captain commenced to rap for order and silence, and so forth. But he took up the gun and broke it, and behold! the gun was completely empty!

"Well, I'll be damned!" says the captain, mad as a hatter and immediately finding himself a alibi. "Why the devil didn't you look at this thing properly, Faulk, before you handed it over? This gun is not only un-

loaded but it has not been fired for a long time. Smell of it!"

Well, the inspector took the gun and smelled of it like he had been told, and looked a perfect fool. But only for a moment. Then he turned on poor Brady, who seemed the most convenient goat.

"Say, Brady, why the hell didn't you break this gun?" he demanded furious. "The idea, you block-head!"

"Excuse me, sir," says Brady, as red as a beet, "but it was you who took it off of her."

And then nobody could say a word because they had all acted like a bunch of dumb-bell cops out of a Knute Divers' comedy and talking wouldn't help any. Milton Sherrill smiled a grim little smile, and come over to my side.

"Don't you worry about this, B. McFadden!" he says in a low tone. "I started pulling a few wires on my way out, and the bail is all taken care of. I am sorry to keep you so long, but I came as quickly as I could."

"Oh, Milton!" I says. "Say it wasn't Nicky! There are other guns in the world, you know, and those two had an awful row!"

"You have less faith in Nick than I have," says Milt a little coolly, or so I imagined. "He has gone to San Diego. He left after the rumpus last night, and has been driving about like a madman ever since, to cool off. He telephoned me from there, and so you see it is impossible for him to be implicated in any way."

"Thank God!" says I. And then I went sort of cold

all over, because why should Milt put so much stress on Nicky's innocence and say so little about my own? Was the stain on my good name working as fast as all that? Oh, it was dreadful! All at once I realized I had come to the end of my nerve.

"You and Adele had better come along in my car," says Milt in that awful, tense, quiet way. "They don't need you here any more, B., and won't need you again unless Strickland makes a charge."

His tones was too much for me. I couldn't reason, I couldn't protest. The world begun to go black before my tired eyes and I felt like I was going crazy, or about to die, or something, or both! Milt did not care! He had come only for business reasons! What a fool I was, what a fool, and how awfully, terribly, I loved him! The police-station walls commenced acting very funny; they leaned towards each other. The ceiling slanted and the floor raised up. And then all of a sudden there was no Milt, no court room, no nothing. Just a blackness where I was alone—entirely alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN I come to I was laying in my own bed, in my own room with mommer sponging my forehead with something cool and sweet-smelling, and a doctor I had never seen before but he had a kind face, well, he was saying something about overstrained nerves and a long rest.

Now I'll tell the world that right up to the point of this doctor saying this mouthful, I had an idea nerves was something to be pulled as an excuse and nothing more, and believe me they are all too often only that. Nerves is mostly nonsense, but sometimes they do get overstrained, and it sure seemed like mine had, and I come to realize, through the week that followed with me that had never before been sick in my life, laying flat on my back, that maybe a rest now and then is as important to a person's business or artistic career as hard work is. Of course I had heard this remark made in the past, but on account of pop being the one who made it, why I had not thought it could be true.

So I just lay there quiet, seeing nobody except only mommer, and allowing her to make up my mind for me on every little matter. And all those members of the public which their family has allowed them to take the entire responsibility and do all the dirty work of supporting the home and so forth, will at once realize how much I enjoyed being sick. And all this time

mommer wouldn't let me say one word about Stricky, or the whole affair.

But being a healthy person by nature and disposition, and a worker by habit, why there come a day when the novelty wore off and I wanted to set up and eat meat and hear the dirt. And it happened that this day Nickolls come to see how was I. Of course he had done it every other day as well, but up to now I hadn't seen him or Bert Green or even Axel, and Gawd knows nobody could rightly accuse Axel of being a mental strain, but mommer would let him up, either. Each day Milt had called up or sent flowers and come to the house a lot. But him I would not of faced at any price, just then.

Well, this meat-eating day I am telling you about, Nicky come at the right moment. And when mommer tiptoed in with some milk toast and the news that he was downstairs I says for her to trade in them slops for a hunk of raw beef or something and to send him right up, because my mind had commenced to work, and I might as well try it out on him as anybody.

"Oh, honey, I don't know should I let you!" says mommer. "They say when the devil is ill the devil a saint will be, but I always say a ounce of prevention is better than a relapse!"

"Oh, send him up, mommer, please!" says I. "And I will promise not to sprain my mind."

So mommer says all right, and steered the bread and milk out again and pretty soon Nicky come clumping up in the bashful way a decent bachelor has in a girl's sick room, and the nicer they are the awkwarder. But he was awful glad to see me, and set down at once on

not alone the side of my bed but my hot water bottle as well, only I wouldn't call his attention to it for fear of embarrassing him worse. And he took both my hands in his and kissed them and couldn't say a word at first, so I tactfully and affectionately did.

"Nicky dear!" I says. "Oh, but I am glad to see you! You are the only one I could talk to, and I just got to talk—I got such a lot of things I want to ask, and mommer keeps giving me only a soft answer. And believe me, Nicky, this is one time it don't turn away wrath but I dasn't let her see it."

"Little Bonnie!" says Nick. "You have given us such a scare! Are you better, really?"

"You bet I am!" I says. "And I just got to know what has been going on. I know Strickland didn't die. Even mommer told me that much. But what has he done? And Anita—where was she? Were the newspapers dreadful? Did they say terrible things about me? Oh, Nicky, tell me the whole truth—it will be so much easier for me if I know, than it is to lie here imagining things!"

"Poor kid!" says Nicky. "Of course I will. Well then, the papers aired the affair, of course, but they were all for you, Bonnie, and the way you responded to Anita's call for help. She did it, of course, no matter what Strickland says about the whole thing being an accident."

"An accident!" says I. "Of course that was it! I should have guessed. Go on, Nicky!"

"Well, when the good-for-nothing scamp came to in the hospital he spilled the beans at first. He was

mad at Anita, mad enough to have her arrested. But he reneged, later. It appears that Anita was jealous of him, and that she was in debt up to her neck. Strickland had promised her five hundred dollars to keep her from being put out of her place, and then as usual, he hadn't made good. He'd stalled her off for several days. The afternoon of the shooting Anita came to see him, desperate for her money. Kit Knute had thrown her over when she took up with Greg, and she was out of work. I suppose Strickland couldn't come across and they had a row. He now says Anita took his gun out of the top drawer of his bureau and threatened to kill herself, and that he seized it. They struggled and the gun went off. At least that's his present version. He has told several, each more dramatic than the last. But he won't press any charge, and she has left town."

"How dreadful!" I says. "Where was Anita that afternoon when I—when——"

"They found her back in her room, full of hop," says Nicky. "She had the gun with her and she was too dazed to even attempt getting way. Her creditors auctioned her furnishings yesterday. It's a nasty mess, little Bonnie, but it is behind you, remember that. You have got to put it out of your mind."

"Somehow I don't see able to," I says. "Oh, Nicky, what's the matter with Hollywood? Why do we get in such messes?"

"We don't, generally," says he promptly and firmly. "The rotters do. And there are a few rotters in every profession, Bonnie. Our community, through its very nature, is more conspicuous, that is all."

"I don't know that you are right, Nicky!" I says earnestly. "I want to get away from this town for a while, and think things over. I've had a big jolt, and I got to get myself straightened out. I want to go some place where I am away even from you and mommer and so forth, and where there is nothing to remind me of the studio."

"You must do it, then," says Nicky, understanding at once. "We will wait for you, on *The Scarlet Letter*. You are not to come back to work until you are well."

"Oh!" says I. "The picture! We was right in the middle of it, wasn't we? But I can't come back just yet. I got to have a breathing spell."

"I tell you what," says Nicky. "You go out to my ranch for a week. At least I call it that. In reality it's just a shack down near Santa Ana, but over on the ocean side. It's miles from anywhere, and is the place I run to when I need perspective. There is a nice old couple who live there and look after it for me, and I'll write them to-night. It's just the place you need."

I looked at his kind eager face and the tousled lion curls, and my eyes filled with tears like a regular sentimental dumb-bell. To think I had such a grand friend!

"Nicky, you are a peach and I will accept!" I says gratefully. "It will be like escaping into heaven."

And it was. There is some people thinks California is Hollywood, and some that thinks it is San Francisco or Los Angeles, and yet again a few who admit there are groves, and so forth. But the part of California which best expresses the spirit of it all is not the pros-

perous cities or orange trees or walnuts and grapes or good roads, though there are enormous crops of all these, but the naked rolling hills of California which swell and fall in great smooth sweeps along the coast between the valleys and the sea.

These hills is peculiar, I do believe, and like no others in the world. They are profoundly quiet and though bare, are full of promise. They are open and plain to see for miles whichever way you look, and in the cañons between them there is great oaks growing clean and strong, small forests of ancient giants as you might say, evergreen and tremendous, once you are down among them, but seen from the bare crest of the nearest hill they seem a mere patch of darkness or like the shadow from a cloud. And along the outer edge of these hills and cañons sweeps hundreds of miles of golden beach with them lace-fringed jade-green breakers breaking on them, like I have told you before, and in the lonely places, wild sea birds by the thousands, crying.

But it ain't lonesome, none of it. Because a person knows them treeless hills are so rich that you could grow roses on them anywheres. All through the dry season they are brown, and then like a miracle a week of rain will have them green as the far-famed ones of Ireland only with the addition of golden poppies. And another reason why these vast hills is not a lonesome place. They are well-proportioned. You don't feel lost in a big room if it is shaped right. And the same is true of these hills I am telling you about, and there is no use in you laughing and passing some remark to

the effect that Nature can't go wrong and so forth, because that is a big mistake and Nature has pulled a lot of boners the same as any natural person does, but the California coast is a big success, and its beauty both rests and inspires a person, no matter how many times they see it.

Well anyways, this ranch which Nicky loaned me was set on one of these hills like as per see above, and it was the very place I needed. I had trouble getting away from mommer but finally I did, and for a week I rode the lonesome trails around the neighborhood of this ranch on Nicky's little old friendly pinto pony, or sat on the porch and watched the Pacific swallow the setting sun, and I thought and thought and each day things got clearer to me about what I had ought to do with the rest of my life. And the conclusion I come to was that I would have to leave the pictures.

It was a terrible decision, and just what I would go to work at after I got out, I hadn't decided. I couldn't see beyond the, as you might say, fatal step. But to continue working in the same business, on the same lot with Milton Sherrill now that I was automatically put out of reach of ever being his wife, was impossible.

Nobody had come near me during the time on the ranch, and I had not even had a letter from mommer. I had expressly wanted to be cut off entirely from the world, and things had worked out fine, for I now had my decision clear. I would go and see Milt and tell him that while I would of course finish the interrupted picture, it would have to be my last one, and I would beg him to let me out of the rest of my contract.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE moving-picture world is the only one where a lady can safely reminisce without its being a confession of age. To recall the days when Lillian Gish was knee-high to a vaudeville act is no sign a person is in any dotage, and even the ones who admit to remembering when Charlie Chaplin was only getting five hundred a week don't necessarily have to be gray around the temples.

And seeing that to be the true fact, why naturally I personally myself do not hesitate to publicly look back to the day of my interview with Milton and all that it has since come to mean to pictures. Of course I got as much modesty as any other successful woman, but I can't help but realize that only for things working the way they done, why pictures would not be what they are to-day.

Well anyways, I set out from Nicky's ranch alone in my car, my mind all made up to go right to the Silvermount lot and get things over and done with. For if a person has decided to have a tooth out, or take up a note, or any other painful operation, why it is a good plan to have it no sooner said than done, as the poet says, and so I didn't even go home to my Spanish Fandango first, but merely telephoned mommer that I was headed for the studio, made sure Milt was going to be in his office and got on my way.

Well, I'll tell the world I was as depressed as a cold waffle when I left the ranch. Sweet daddy! I'll say so! Because here I was about to zinc my life ambition and so forth, and the nearer I got to Hollywood the less I liked my duty, and the temptation to shrink it stole over me like a frost. As I went by the Muro lot, which was the first big studio that I had to pass on my way in town, my heart give a silent groan as you might say, like a mother responding to her babe, and then it give a leap of curiosity, because the Muro was plainly closed.

Well, well, I thought, ain't it remarkable how things changes in the pictures and when you come back after being away for a week, why, you never can tell who has failed or succeeded, and Gawd knows maybe I will find that Axel is now a star, and I says this to myself because it was the most unlikely thing that I could imagine.

The town of Hollywood itself was in one of its gay moods too. It seemed to me I had never been there when it was so crowded with snappy people and bright clothes, and even the gardens looked like they had burst out into extra blooms just to get my goat. It all looked good in the way anything you are about to give up forever, does, and any woman who has given away a dress or a hat, if nothing more serious, will at once understand my feelings.

The usual herd of cars was crowded about the Silvermount curbs, and there sure was nothing shut-up-looking about our—that is, their, lot! Actually it made me a little sore to see things going on much the same

and in fact a little more so while I was away and was, further, about to get out for good. Busy? Right then the Silvermount looked like the busiest place in America. A big crowd of extras was going off on a desert location, and Axel in a Arab costume waved to me from the middle of the bunch as I parked my car and headed for the office. Nicky grabbed me by both hands at the main entrance, and then dusted away in a big hurry.

Once inside, and past the welcome of the office force, I could see Trixie Trueman, with McGee directing, working over on Number Four. They were making a drawing-room sequence, and somehow the sight made me wild. Everywhere, all around me, the crowd was busy, hard at work, interested, and suddenly the full realization come over me that all this had been going on while I was away and would continue to go on after I had left. And at the thought something inside my mind got up on its hind legs and hollered, and it was all I could do to keep the tears of self-pity out of my eyes.

"Now, B. McFadden," I says to myself, "you keep steady! Your mind is made up—a real decision that was two weeks in growing. So don't you go letting any momentary jazz upset the whole business!"

And then, feeling considerably stronger, I went along to Milton's office and says to the outside girl can I see him and she says yes, in a moment, he is busy. And actually I had to set and wait, and this didn't make me a whole lot happier, either. Sweet daddy! I could actually feel my strength of mind running out the

end of my fingers and toes! It made me wild to sit there like a dumb-bell applying for her first job or something, and I wanted to show them I was somebody. Then I again remembered I was getting out, and that a year from now nobody would even remember who I was, or anything!

Well, in the middle of these happy thoughts Slim Rolf come out of the teakwood temple and says hello Bonnie glad you are back and so forth, and then I actually got permission to go in to see Milt. And when I got in he was alone but talking on the telephone, and so merely give me a gesture to sit down, which I did, mad clean through. And then I waited and waited while Milt listened and says Yeh, yeh, no Al, yeh, for what seemed about a year. Then at last he hung up.

"Well, B.!" he says. "I say, this is fine! You look wonderfully, and it does my eyes good to see you back again. Are you absolutely all right?"

"Yes, Milt," I says firmly. "I am righter than I've been in a long time. So right that I——"

"Great, great!" he interrupted me, slapping the arms of his chair and springing up. "Able to come back to work to-morrow?"

"Yes, Milt," I says. "I can come back and get this picture finished right away, but then——"

"Then we are going to put you over really big!" says Milt. "Look nere, B., do you remember that picture you made with Nickolls—Alias Cinderella?"

Did I remember it? Sweet daddy!

"Say listen, Milt, are you cuckoo?" I says. "I guess

my memory is that long, all right. I'm hardly likely to forget that one time I was a star."

"Well," says he, deadly serious, "it is a great picture! I saw it last week up at Fresno, and I have bought it in cheap. We are going to call it *The Stepchild* and release it as a new issue with you as the star. We will spend a lot of money on it, and it will be the picture of the year. Why, it's a great picture, I tell you, B., and you certainly have a wonderful future!"

Whatter you know about that! I felt kind of limp and weak, and floored. Nicky's picture! How things did work around in circles for sure. Poor Nicky, after all his labor, the result would appear as a Silvermount release. It wasn't fair! And yet it couldn't be helped, for apparently that was the way the picture business was always done. I felt sick over it, and I tried to tell Milt so. But as he sat there, his handsome face all alight with excitement and interest, why what I had come to say wouldn't quite reach my lips.

"I had no idea you could act as you did in that picture!" Milt was saying. "Why, child, you are amazing!" Then he pulled a line which at first I couldn't realize that he had said it, and thought well, I guess I didn't hear right. "And it's not only because I love you that I think you are a great actress," says he.

I could only stare at him without a word. He got up and come over and sat beside me on the window seat, which is where I was.

"B. McFadden, don't tell me that you are surprised," says he. "You must have known it all along. Why, I

have loved you since that very first day on the train. When will you marry me, dear?"

Well, I got considerable respect for my public, and of course will admit they got a right to know all about me up to a certain point, beyond which they can go no whicher. Also I realize that a public person and great artist has no private life and so forth, but there is a limit to even that, just the same, and refinement compels me to draw the line some place, and that place is the rest of what I and Milt said and did after the above sequence, and I am not going to give you the conventional full close-up. Anyways, the censors have taken to timing them close-up kisses and would surely of cut ours down. Well anyways, after a time-lapse sub-title of Later, Milton and I commenced to get sensible, and then I told him what I had come in to say in the first place.

"Dear!" I says, "I will marry you any time you say. But oh, Milt, I want to get out of the pictures. Now more than ever."

"Why?" says he. "What is on your mind about them, honey?"

"Well," says I, "I don't quite know. But they are a rotten game, Milt. Not healthy, somehow. A great art, yes, I will admit that, but working in them does something awful to people. Can't you see it, yourself? It's like a poison and it demoralizes them pretty nearly all."

"I know what you mean," he says frowning over it. "Yet that should not be necessary. You mean the lax living and thinking which one falls into so easily out

here. Sometimes I believe that this semi-tropical climate is as much to blame as the pictures are."

"Well, the combination of the two is hard on ordinary mortals with only average morals," I says. "I don't know do I want to waste my energy fighting the something that is in the air here, darling. I was brought up in New England, Milt, and so was you, hon, and there is something in this outfit as a whole that goes against us, and what we was taught to believe was decent and right."

"I know!" he says thoughtfully.

"Before I come here to-day," I says, "I had made up my mind I was through. For more than one reason. And now I want to be just your wife, hon, and to make you a good home, and lay off of acting. And I don't want to do it in Hollywood, either, but in our own kind of atmosphere where we belong."

"Dearest!" says Milt.

Later. That's another time lapse, see?

"You are dead right," says he. "We don't belong in this game, and we will get out. Why, don't you remember how opposed to the pictures I was when you first met me? I told you I hoped never to touch them. Well, I was right, you see!"

And although this sounded a little prematurely married as you might say, why I let it go and smiled at him in agreement.

"Why, hon, being married to you will use up all the talent I've got!" I says, laughing. "And if I can act the part of a good wife, why I will be perfectly satisfied. I'm just sick of these parts where I have to vamp,

and of going for my recreation to parties where they mix the cocktails in a washing machine!"

"And I am tired of being out of my element too!" Milt declared. "Where shall we live, B.? Name the place and you shall have it!"

"Oh, Milt!" I says, slipping my arms around his neck. "How about Stonybrook? Your dear mother's house would be the ideal home for the both of us, dear, and living in it would help us cling to our ideals!"

"Bonnie! Would you, really?" says Milt. "You blessed child, nothing would make me happier than to call the old place home once more!"

Well, that was all settled and the anxious reader can write in another time lapse and then consider that I have broke away again because of something very important occurring to me.

"Milt!" I says. "What do you know? I had for the minute forgotten all about mommer!"

"I should hope you would!" says he laughing. "Such things are allowable at these times, surely! And after all, she is not your real mother, you know."

"But I love her, Milt!" I says earnestly. "Perhaps I love her even more than I would if she was the genuine article. You see I could never afford to fight with her like I might of done if we had been relatives. So we have shown each other only our best sides and are more than mother and daughter, because we are friends. And I can't go back on her now. I can't desert her, Milt, when I marry you."

"Well," says Milt, "Mrs. Delane is a fine woman, B., and I will never forget what she has done for you,

dear. If you wish her to make her home with you I won't oppose it."

"Oh, Milt, you are too wonderful!" I says. "I just couldn't endure to think of Adele spending a lonely old age, and of course she has got no one but me. What a lovely time we will have out of the pictures, in our old New England home, with mommer and everyone."

"Except pop!" says Milt. "I draw the line at pop!"

"And so do I!" I says. "Pop has simply got to learn to work for his own living, and you must back me up and refuse to help him!"

"I will," says Milt firmly.

Well, everything was beautifully settled by then and I felt as if I was in a trance or a happy dream or something, and it was sure a great relief to know that soon we would be leaving all this behind us and so forth. And then all at once like approaching thunder there was footsteps pounding down the hall as if a elephant had broke loose from our animal department, and the teakwood flew open and in rushed Big Benny with neither coat or, for once, any cigar in his face, and what little hair he had was sticking up wildly with excitement. The Big Egg was all red in the face, and for the first few moments he couldn't speak a word, but only blow and wave his hands in a few wild native gestures.

"What do you think?" he gasped at last. "We can buy out Muro cheap! Only seventeen million dollars! Oy! Such good news!"

"What?" exclaimed Milt, all excited too. "Only seventeen millions? Why, that's throwing it away!"

"Sure it is! What you think I got such excitement over it for, else?" says Benny wiping his streaming face. "Say listen, for three years I been trying for a merger with them people, and now is our chance. Why, it's the opportunity of a lifetime! When we got this combination, believe me, we will rule the industry!"

"That's so, Ben!" says Milt. "Why man, it's the biggest thing in years. With their lot and ours combined we could make some superproductions that would knock the eye out of these German pictures. And the clear field it would give us—— Say, listen, does Muro himself want to stay in?"

"Sure he does!" says Benny. "He's in my office now, waiting."

"If he wants to come to us," says Milt intently, "that means it's the real thing. If he was merely offering to sell out I wouldn't trust the crook. He'd probably intend floating something new!"

"And with the Muro releases as well as our own," says I breathlessly, "look at the field a star would have! Twice the ordinary publicity!"

"You sure would have it, honey!" says Milt. "By heaven, I didn't have any idea you would really be able to pull the trick, Ben! I congratulate you!"

"Congratulate also yourself!" says Benny as the two of them shook hands like a coupla crazy schoolboys. "As the financial head of the concern, Milton, believe me you got the greatest future in the industry, and I must say you are a wonderful manager!"

"Ben, you are a marvel!" says Milt, and they regu-

larly danced around at that while I stood with my hands clasped tight on my chest, watching them and thinking my Gawd but Mary Pickford has never had half the advertising which I will get from this merger and won't I just work like a hound so as to deserve every little bit of it too! And then pretty soon them two clowns come down to earth and Milt turned back to the Big Egg real serious.

"Benny!" he says. "There is something even more magnificent than this merger which I am to be congratulated on. Bonnie is going to marry me, old-timer!"

"So?" says Benny, beaming. "Well, that is certainly grand news. I do congratulate the two of you, and am glad I was able to bring it such a fine engagement present like I done just now, and to know the big merger will be all the stronger for keeping the both of you in it!"

Well, when Big Ben pulled that line, why all at once I and Milt exchanged a look like a coupla sheep. And it is Gawd's truth that up to the very minute, Stonybrook and the old home and our pure and domestic future had been wiped right out of our mind. Our spontaneous joy about Muro had showed up the both of us pretty clear, too, because it proved what was closest to our hearts. And sweet daddy, didn't we feel like a coupla fools though! But being engaged to be married had already filled me with the conventional sense of wifely sacrifice, and so I hurried to find a excuse and volunteered to be the goat and save Milton's pride and so forth.

"Milt," I says, "haven't you practically promised to sign that contract to stay on here?"

"Well yes, I practically had," says he, looking at the toe of his shoe.

"Well, I don't want to influence you any, hon," I says, "but honest, I don't see how you can go back on them now."

"I suppose not," says Milt. "But how about Stonybrook? My promise to you is even more important, B."

"Oh, that will be all right!" I says hastily. "You see, come to remember it, I got a contract all signed myself, for two more pictures with this concern, and I couldn't hardly break that, now could I?"

"Why, see here, hon, I wouldn't dream of asking you to do any such thing!" Milt declared indignantly.

And as of course I wouldn't attempt to go against his will in anything, why that settled matters and we mutually understood that we was to stay.

While all this was going on Ben stood looking from one to the other of us, rubbing his hands nervously.

"Say listen!" says he. "You wasn't thinking about quitting, for heaven's sake? What nonsense!"

"I think perhaps it was nonsense!" Milt admitted to him. "But I will sign that contract, Ben, for, let us say, three years. And we will close with Muro at once. When my contract and B.'s run out, then will be time enough to decide whether we want to go on in the pictures or not!"

"That means you are in them forever!" says the Big Egg enthusiastically.

And with them words of wisdom he rushed off to catch Muro's mind while it was still that way. When the door had shut behind him I come over to Milt, and putting my hands on his shoulders I looked him square in the eyes.

"Dear!" I says. "We won't kid ourselves. Once in the pictures, always in them. Isn't that so?"

"I expect you are right, B.," says Milt. "And after all they are the greatest game on earth to-day. I'll be honest about it. I want to stay!"

"So do I!" I cried. "Oh, Milt, together we will make the greatest pictures the country has ever seen."

"On a clean lot," says Milt.

"With no favorites," says I.

"And no graft!" says Milt.

"With square finances," I sang.

"And sane salaries," Milt went on.

"And a home in Hollywood," says I.

"With a swimming pool and a projecting room!" yelled Milt.

"And mommer to live with us!" says I.

"Yes, I suppose so!" says Milt.

And at that very minute we realized somebody was knocking on the door, and who would it be, speaking of angels, but mommer herself.

From the way she entered the room I at once seen something out of the ordinary was up, for not alone did she close the door after herself in a mysterious manner, and then take up a commanding position, but commenced mugging at us in a attempt to register the

possession of a big secret. But I was in no mood for any nonsense, so I just flung myself at her and give her a big kiss on each cheek.

"Oh, mommer darling!" I says. "What do you think? I and Milton are going to be married!"

"My land!" says mommer. "You don't expect me to be surprised at that, do you? But I'm real glad, hon, honest I am, although now of course you will be through with me. They say it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, but I'll say not when it blows out the last match!"

"Now, mommer!" I says tenderly. "Don't you pull any pathetic stuff about being a last match, because we are not going to let you go. You are coming to live with us!"

"No, Bonnie, dearie, I'm going to do no such thing!" says she promptly. "You certainly are a good daughter to me, the best I ever had, in fact. But I always say it's a wise child who knows when to go no further. And I got other plans for myself."

"Why, mommer!" says I, drawing away from her. And as I got a full-length view of mommer I realized for the first time the big change in her appearance.

For gone was mommer's long skirts and modest dark colors. She was dolled in oyster-gray satin up pretty near to her knees, and high-heeled slippers and silk stockings to match, and a snappy little hat of yellow flowers perched on the one side of her stylishly dressed hair. How I had come not to notice all this first shot can only be accounted for by me being blind and selfish, like most folks in love.

"Why, mommer!" I says, gasping. "How sweet you look, and how snappy!"

Mommer blushed like a girl and backed off towards the door. With her hand on the knob she give a dramatic pause.

"I got a little surprise for you all," she says, "and I guess I will now bring it in!" And with that she pulls open the teakwood, and in walks pop.

Well, I had been sort of prepared for it to be him on account I am no dumb-bell, or blind either. But I was far from expecting the pop which showed. As he come into the room I could scarcely believe my eyes, for if Adele was dressed up like a peahen, believe me pop was like a peacock, and then some. From the crown of his green plush hat, which was set jauntily on the one side of his varnished hair, to the soles of his natty shoes with the pearl-gray spats, pop was some plush horse! He had a gardenia in his buttonhole and a two-carat stone in his tie, and the smile on his face was as smug as the Sphinx itself!

"Well, well, Bonnie dearie!" says he, swinging in and parking a huge silver-mounted cane on Milt's desk along with his new yellow gloves and his lid. "Well, well, all! I expect maybe you are surprised at your old pop now, hey, daughter dear? And you, Mr. Sherrill! Sure it's a real treat to meet you on equal terms at last!"

"Pop!" says I. "For heaven's sake, explain. And as for equal terms with Milt, you need not think you can sass him just because I am going to marry him!"

"Marry him, are ye?" says pop genially. "Is that

so? Well, well, now I couldn't have chosen better for ye myself!"

"Thank you, Mr. McFadden!" says Milt. "Sit down everybody, do!"

"Pop, don't be a fool!" says I. "Those clothes—that pin! If you took them from Adele, I'll—well, I'll murder you, that's all!"

"From Adele?" says pop with dignity. "Daughter, I am surprised at your injustice to your parent. Sure I bought them things with my own money!"

"My Gawd!" I says feebly.

"It's the truth!" chimed in Adele. "He did, honey. They have found oil on his ranch!"

"Pop!" says I feebly. "To think of that—you to strike oil and get rich after all your laziness! It's too much!"

"Daughter," says pop slowly and with great dignity, "I don't know why you are doubtful of me the way you are! It has been hard work getting this fortune of mine, and all your life I've told ye I'd do it some day!"

"Oh, the poor man!" Adele broke in. "What he says is true, dear. He actually did go to work on that real-estate proposition and cleared the land with his own hands. Then he started drilling an artesian well, to get a water supply for the lots, and struck oil."

"It's a gusher," says pop with extreme dignity. "Bringing me around eight hundred dollars a day for the past week. And we got two more wells started."

Suddenly he leaned over me, the realest look in his eyes I had ever seen there.

"Bonnie," says he, "you told your old father the

truth. And the very first time in my life I ever went to work made me a rich man.”

“And got him a wife!” says Adele. “Oh, hon, we was married this afternoon, and I’m really your mommer now. I do hope it won’t make any difference between us, dearie?”

“Adele!” says I. “Not much! With you really in the family, and Milton for my very own I am as happy as—as a dumb-bell!”

“Well,” says mommer with a sentimental sigh, “they say there’s nothing half so sweet in life as love’s young dream; and I’ll say they’re right!”

THE END





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